THE MARVEL MAGAZINE OF ADULT FANTASY / OCTOBER 1981 / 75p

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this issue

Arthur Suydam
Tim Conrad
Trina Robbins
Jim Starlin
and a new fantasy series
"Children of the Stars"
by Charles Vess

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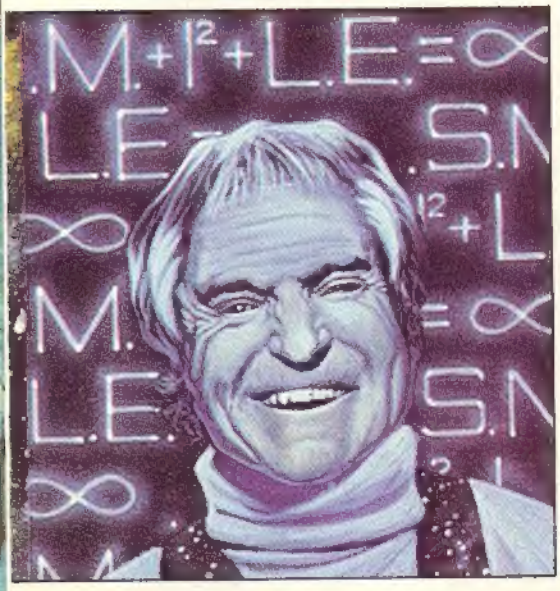
Attention Retailers:
For retail display announcement
see page 90



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OCTOBER 1981 VOL. 1, NO. 8

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CENTURIES AGO, THE STORY OF ROBINSON CRUSOE WAS WRITTEN. MAROONED ON A LOST ISLAND, UNENCUMBERED BY SOCIAL INFLUENCES OR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCULPTURING WHICH CONCEALS MAN'S TRUE NATURE FROM HIMSELF, HE STRUGGLED TO SURVIVE; AND IN HIS STRUGGLE, SHOWED MAN TO BE A CREATURE OF INVENTION AND ENTERPRISE.
WE TOO ARE SURVIVORS; SURVIVORS OF THE ILL-FATED BARGE, EXODUS II, WHICH CRASHED ONTO THIS UNCHARTED WORLD LONG, LONG AGO... I CAN HARDLY REMEMBER...
I'VE FORGOTTEN MY REAL NAME. I ANSWER ONLY TO THE ENDLESS FLOW OF OBSCENITIES MY OPPONENT BESTOWS UPON ME. THESE HAVE BECOME MY TITLE.
THE CHALLENGE OF SURVIVAL HAS BEEN MET; EXISTING ON AN ALIEN PLANET HAS BEEN FACED. WE ARE CREATURES OF INVENTION AND WE HAVE INVENTED A GAME; A PURPOSE FOR LIFE IN THIS MEANINGLESS EXISTENCE. IT IS A GAME WORTHY OF OURSELVES, OUR SKILLS AND INGENUITY, WHICH WE AFFECTIONATELY CALL...
A LITTLE LOVE, A LITTLE HATE!
Suyong © 81

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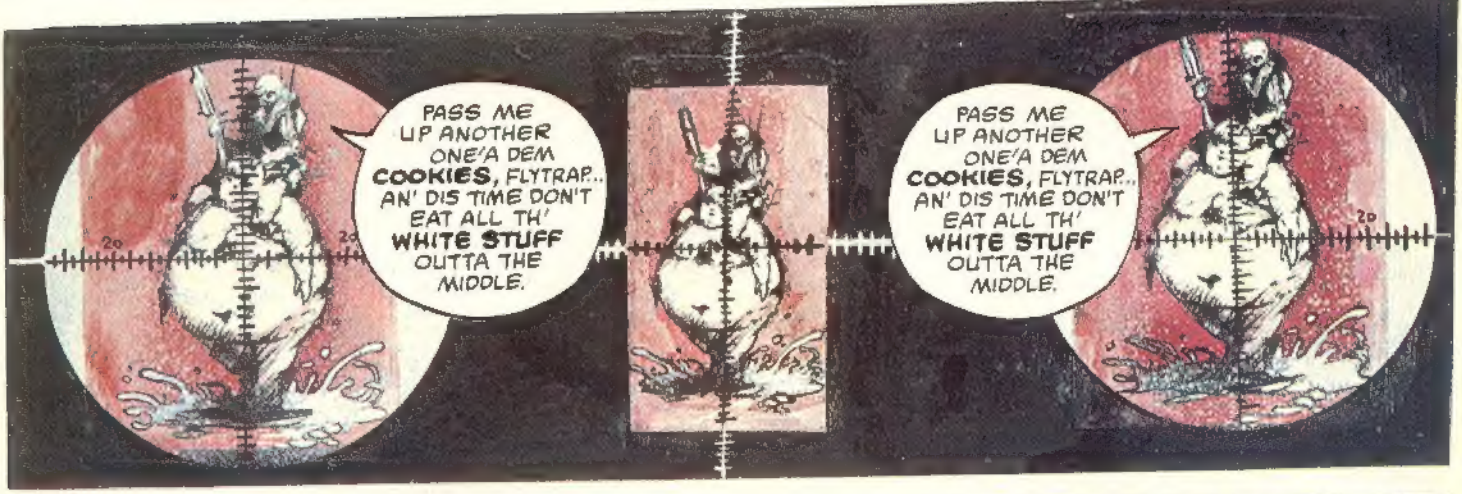
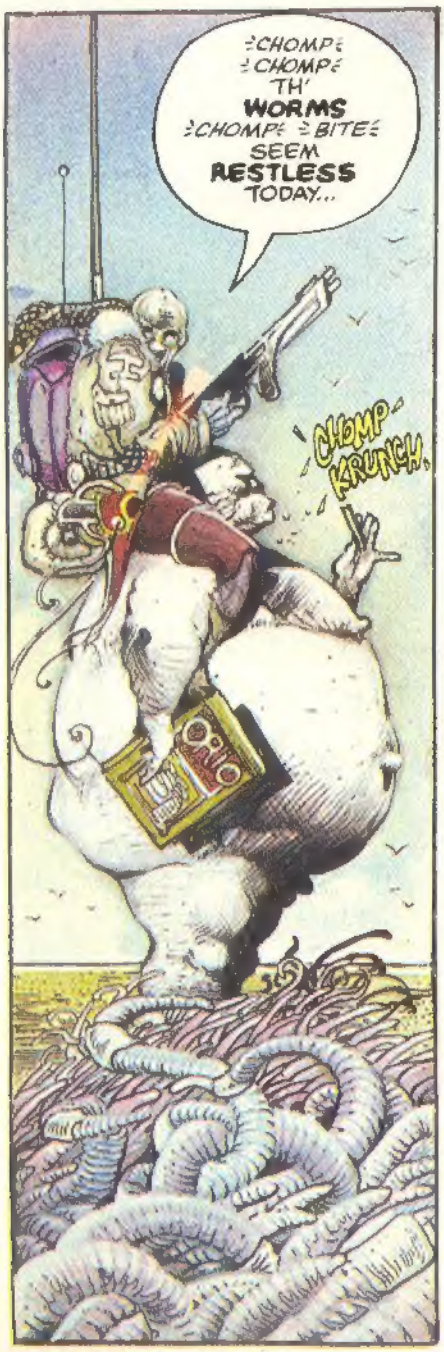
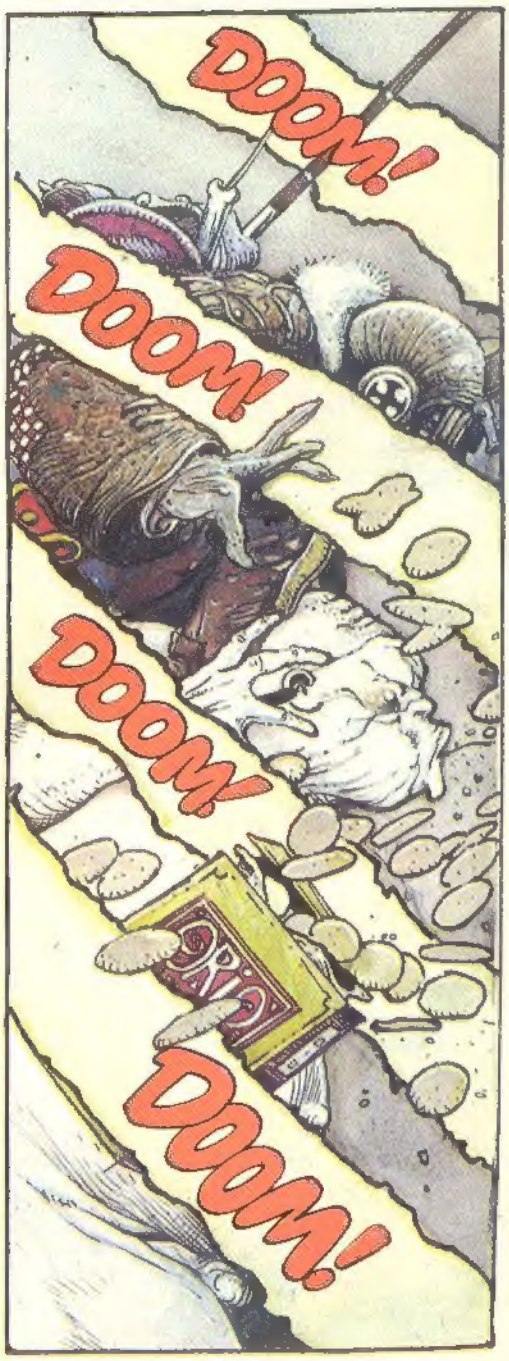
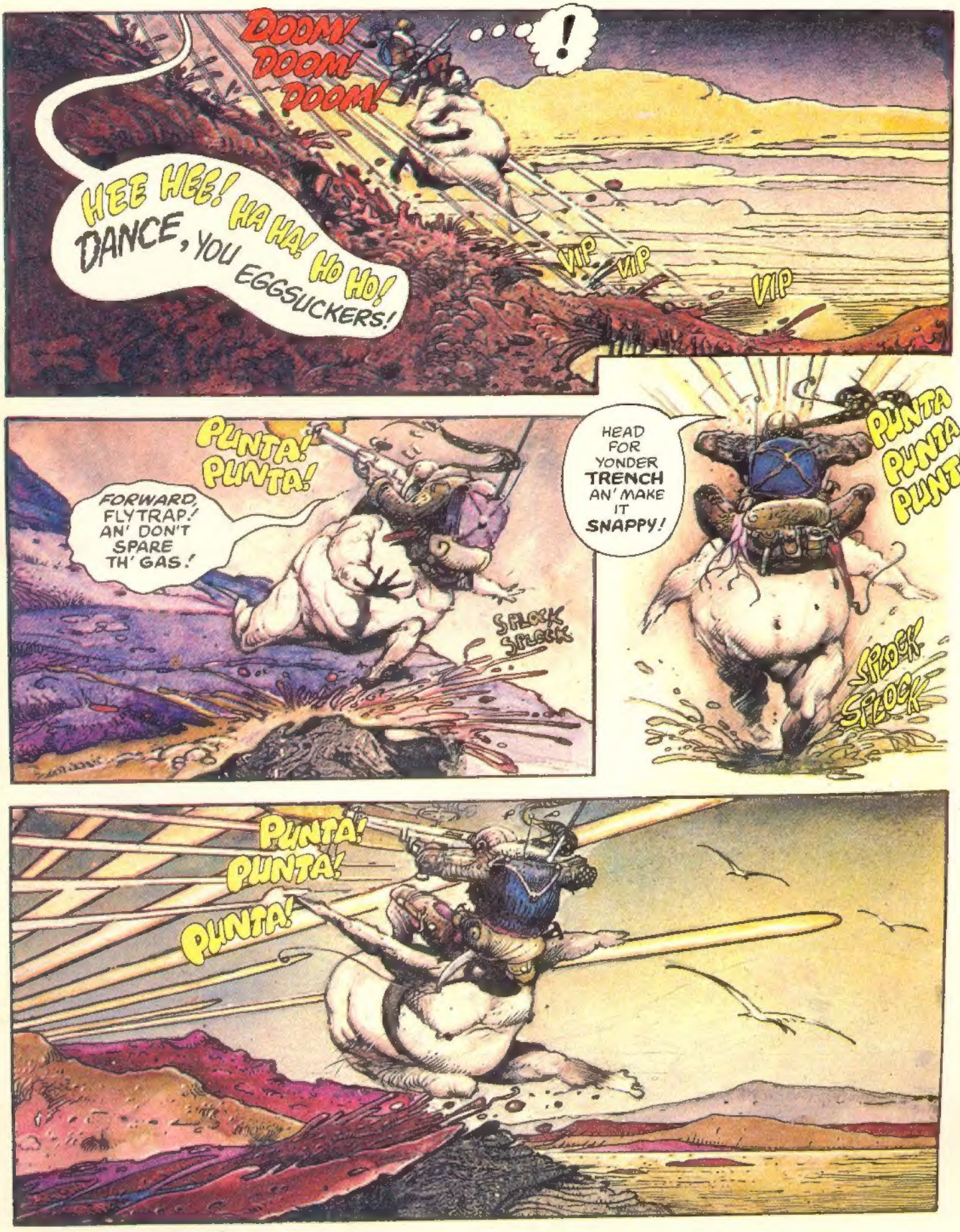

PASS ME UP ANOTHER ONE'A DEM COOKIES, FLYTRAP.. AN' DIS TIME DON'T EAT ALL TH' WHITE STUFF OUTTA THE MIDDLE.
PASS ME UP ANOTHER ONE'A DEM COOKIES, FLYTRAP.. AN' DIS TIME DON'T EAT ALL TH' WHITE STUFF OUTTA THE MIDDLE.


CHOMP CHOMP TH' WORMS CHOMP BITE SEEM RESTLESS TODAY...
CHOMP KRUNCH
ORIO

TH' WIND WHISPERS A SONG OF BING BANG BOOM CRUNCH WITH .44 CALIBER ARMOR PIERCING NODULES PITPATTERING 'CROSS TH' PLAIN'S OPEN VASTNESS.
WE BEST SCRAM OUTTA DIS UNPROTECTED FIELD, FLYTRAP, BEFORE--

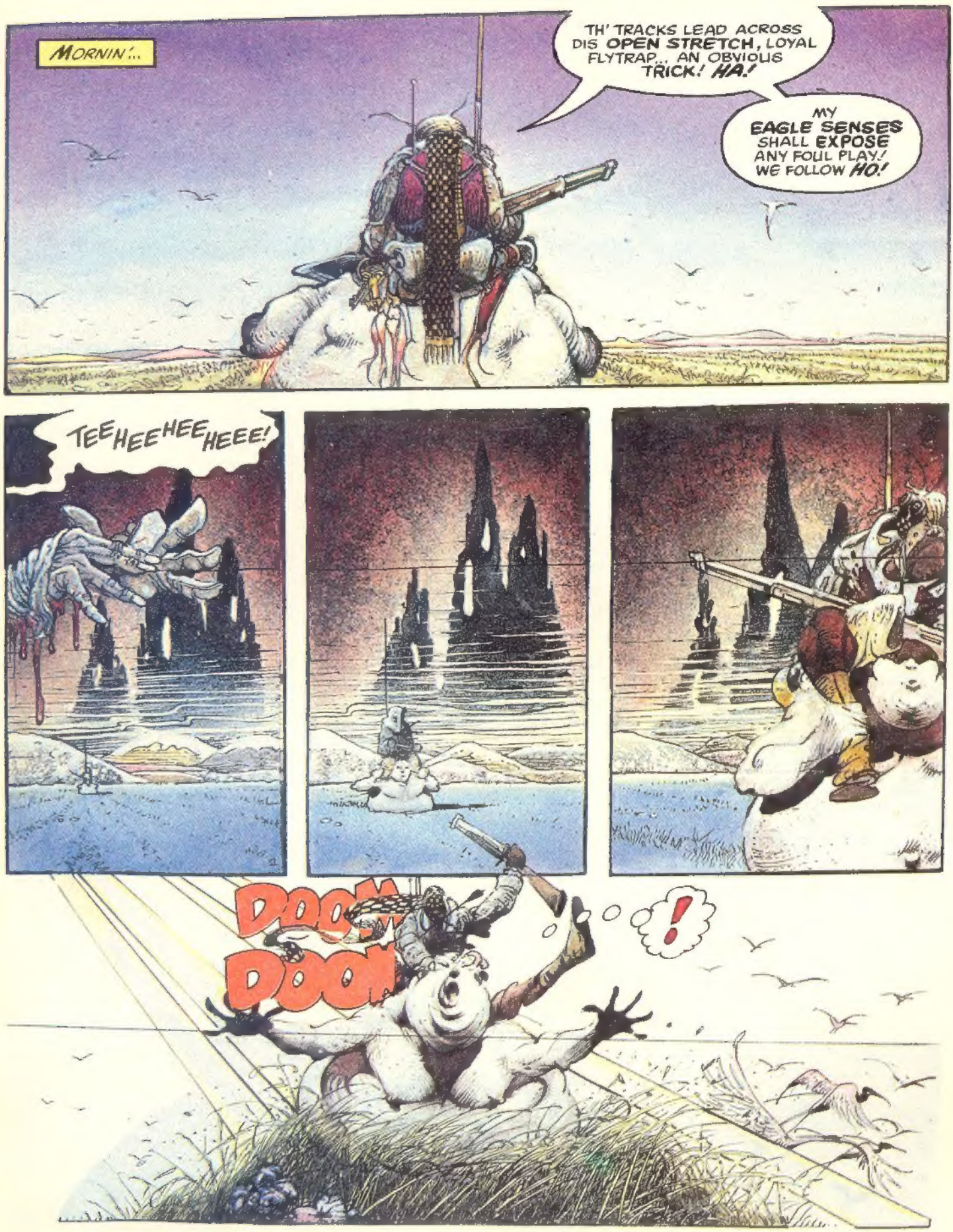

DOOM!
DOOM!
DOOM!
ORIO
DOOM!

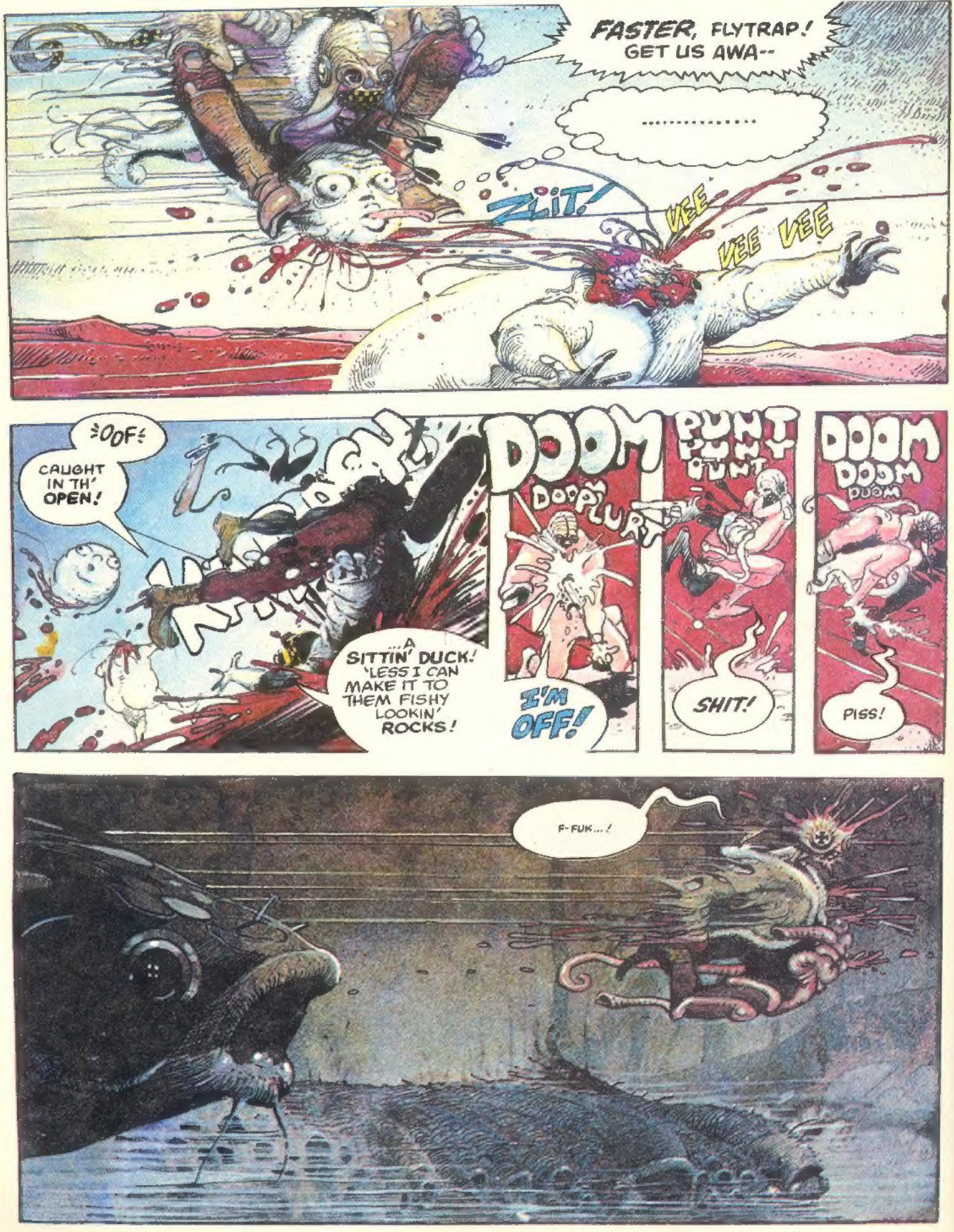

DOOM! DOOM! DOOM!
...!
HEE HEE! HA HA! HO HO! DANCE, YOU EGGSUCKERS!
VIP
VIP
VIP
PUNTA! PUNTA!
FORWARD, FLYTRAP! AN' DON'T SPARE TH' GAS!
SPLOCK SPLOCK
HEAD FOR YONDER TRENCH AN' MAKE IT SNAPPY!
PUNTA PUNTA PUNT!
SPLOCK SPLOCK
PUNTA! PUNTA! PUNTA!

HEY YOU EGG-SUCKIN' GEEK! YOU STILL KICKIN' OR IS YOU DECEASED, DEAD, KAPUT?! HAW!
POK!
HEE HAW HAW!
@#%@!!
DIS IS GONNA REQUIRE STRATEGY!
AND...
GITTIN' MIGHTY QUIET OVER THERE, EGGSUCKER...
YOU WRITIN' YER ABDICATION SPEECH R' SUMTHIN'?! HAR!
QUIETLY, FLYTRAP.

YEOW!
SUCK ON SOME'A DESE EGGS, BIGMOUTH!
BOOM
PUNT
PUNT
BUT...
GONE...
HO! WHAT'S DIS? A PATCH OF BLOOD... TELLIN' A TALE OF LOVELY BIG HOLES WITH CRIMSON REDNESS FLOWIN' FREELY!
THE FUK'R COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN VERY FAR...
WE'LL FOLLOW, FAITHFUL FLYTRAP!
SCRACH
SCRACH
AT LEAST WE GOT HIS...
...G-GUN!
SSSSSSSSS
!!?
WUNK
WUNK
WUNK

HEE HEE! HA HA! HOO HOO! LAY DOWN AN' DIE, EGGSUCKER! YOU ARE A DEAD MAN! I WIN! HAR HAR!
ZZZZZZ
COUGH GAK COUGH
BA-DOOM!
THAT NIGHT, AFTER TWELVE BEERS, I PAID HOMAGE TO TH' GODS...
... AN' GAVE SACRIFICE FOR A QUICK KILL BY PISSIN' OVER TH' EDGE OF A HIGH PRECIPICE.
I CAST MY MESSAGE TO TH' EASTERN WINDS...
...IN HOPE IT MIGHT FIND MY ENEMY.


MORNIN'...
TH' TRACKS LEAD ACROSS DIS OPEN STRETCH, LOYAL FLYTRAP... AN OBVIOUS TRICK! HA!
MY EAGLE SENSES SHALL EXPOSE ANY FOUL PLAY! WE FOLLOW HO!
TEEHEEHEEHEEE!
DOOM
DOOM
!


FASTER, FLYTRAP! GET US AWA--
.....
ZLIT!
VEE VEE VEE
OOF!
CAUGHT IN TH' OPEN!
...A SITTIN' DUCK! 'LESS I CAN MAKE IT TO THEM FISHY LOOKIN' ROCKS!
DOOM
DOOPLURT
I'M OFF!
PUNT PUNT PUNT
SHIT!
DOOM DOOM DUOM
PISS!
F-FUK...!

Uhhhhh....I DON'T... FEEL... SO GOOD...!
:HACK: :COUGH:
BUT... IT'S ONLY A SCRATCH. HEY, YOU PENCIL-NECK GEEK! :COUGH: COME AN' GET IT! :HACK:
WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU CHICKEN OR SOMETHIN'?!
:WEEEEEE!:
COME OUT OF THERE, EGG-SUCKER!
NO...?
AWRIGHT! THEN I'M COMIN' IN TO--
HEY! AIN'T NOTHIN' LEFT OF YOU, EGGSUCKER! JUST AN' OL' TAPE RECORDER SPOUTIN' DEAD MAN'S WORDS!
AW, YOU MISSED ME BY A MILE :GAK: A MILE!
HEEHEE! HOHO! I WIN! I FINALLY...
YER GRANNY IS A... TICK! TICK! TICK! TICK!
POOH!

IT IS A GAME WORTHY OF OURSELVES. WE HAVE PLAYED IT LONG. WE PLAY IT WELL.

MAKER

© 1981 Mark Wheatley

Julian glanced at his watch as he stalked through the hall of W.E. Planet, Inc. He had an office in this building, though it seemed like he never got to use it. Without any staff he was always working nine ways to Sunday to do his job.

Terry was overworked as usual when Julian hurried through her office. His secretary was a one woman wonder; she kept up a phone conversation by nodding at the visual, shoved several files at him and said "These just came in, Julie. How'd it go?" Julian took the files and made a thumbs-down gesture. Then he stepped into his own office.

The meeting had been with the appropriations board. Once again they had refused his request for staff or extra funding. They just didn't take his duties seriously.

Julian sat at his desk and shook his head. This was a money making business. W.E. Planet had the field to itself. There were no other planet forming outfits in business. If you wanted a planet tailor-made to your desires, then you came to W.E. Planet, Inc. And after the astronomical price had been paid, a specialized team of telepathic wonder-workers, called Makers, would weave your dream planet for you out of the very fabric of space. It was a very precise, finely tuned operation all the way through. Monitors stationed all over the galaxy had to observe each Creation, watching closely and keeping the Maker team from upsetting the balance of the spheres. And the money invested somehow became a mere trickle by the time his office came due.

Julian frowned at the pile of paper on his desk. Not only did he have to do the initial exam, but he constantly had to wade through the ongoing reports on the Maker teams.

He rubbed his weary eyes until spots appeared, and then he started going over the new files. After a moment he checked the file's date.

"These charts are two days old!"

Terry, [illegible] me! Emergency!"

[illegible] realm."

Julian felt the fear run through him like an icy wind. "Omar, who's the Maker on this job?"

"Tyson, Jack Tyson. Why?"

Julian forced himself to speak calmly. "Tyson has a stability deficiency. His wife died four days ago."

Julian felt himself washed with a wave of I-told-you-so indignation. But there wasn't time enough for it to crash on any shore. "I didn't. I only just got the reports, Omar, we've got to abort immediately."

Julian didn't wait for a reply. He just signed off and settled back into his chair. What would happen now? If only he had his own computer time to run a simulation. But he didn't. All he had was his mind. Well, he'd damn well use it.

First he diagrammed the situation.

There were three high level sensitives in a Maker team. Tyson was a Maker. Julian glanced at Tyson's chart. Jonnys and Pierce were back-up. They both checked in at stable plus. Would they be able to anchor Tyson when he made the mental leap to Godhood? Could they keep one of his feet set in the real world? Or would his recent hardships drive him into permanent residence in a hell of his own making? And if he went over, how much of the real world would be affected?

Julian realized his call buzzer was on and activated his screen.

Julian would have spoken if he had had the words. But there was nothing to say that hadn't already been unspoken.

Julian said grimly, "I don't have the slightest idea." Omar's face fairly glowed with anger.

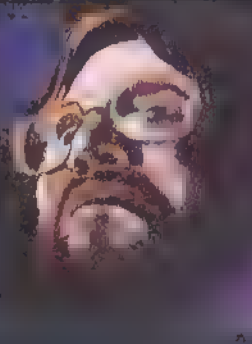
"Well, at least talk to Tyson. Get him to listen. Reason with him. Can't you do that? Aren't you guys supposed to be able to manipulate people?"

Julian forced himself not to laugh. He couldn't even convince the board to properly fund his office. How could he be expected to talk a deranged man out of Godhood? But he sighed and said, "All right, patch him through."

The screen went dark leaving Julian alone with his thoughts. The view was of space. Distant stars scattered across darkling depths. The observation drone was pretty far out from the planet-forming activity. But it was rapidly moving in closer.

In the distance Julian could see the forming planet, an oblong ball of molten lava, boiling in the cold vacuum of space. Then he spotted them. Like three dark angels they hung over the flaming pits of the world they were making. A voice crackled, godlike, out of nowhere, "Any time, Julian, and the sooner the better."

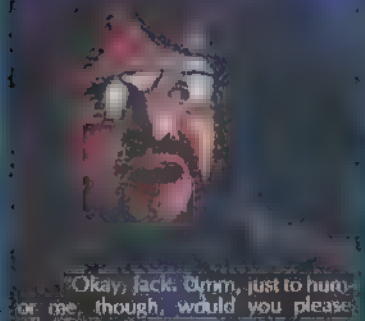
Like an actor with the first lines of a new show on his lips, Julian spoke. "Jack? Jack Tyson? This is Julian Pyle. I'm your Neuro-sensitologist... Jack?"



"Yes, yes. I'm very busy."

Julian watched as land masses began to congeal on the surface of the lava seas. While he watched he tried desperately to think of a delicate way to put it. But he had Tyson's complete mental chart and he knew there was no point in dancing around the truth with the man. Tyson was too intelligent for that. "It's about your stability rating, Jack. Maker Control. I don't think you should be playing God only four days after a major tragedy." Julian waited while storm clouds swept across the globe spilling rain on virgin earth. "Jack?"

"Look, Dr. Pyle, obviously I don't agree. I'm fine. Just busy."



"Okay, Jack. Umm, just to humor me, though, would you please abort?"

"No."

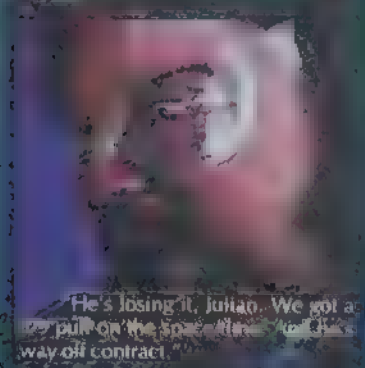
"Why not?"

"Because, I, ah, need it."

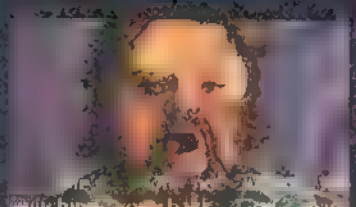
Julian thought, *There's no better therapy than work.*

"I need Rose. It's gonna be Rose."

"It's what?" For a moment Julian had actually allowed himself to believe that Tyson could handle it. But charts don't lie. The form of his work only gave the illusion of a normal mental flow. Before he could answer, Omar had replaced Creation on his



"He's losing it, Julian. We got a pull on the space-time. He's way off contract."



switching over back. God, I can
you've [illegible] him!

In an instant the scene of Creation was again on the screen. And the view was forever etched on Julian's mind. Maker Control was still on audio, and Omar's weak voice explained. "It was Jonnys. He tried to take control. Tyson just blasted him."

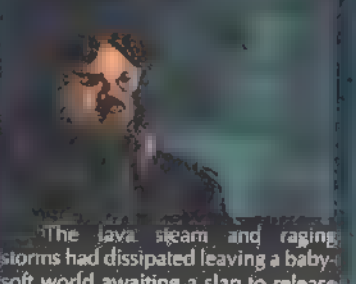
Julian searched for options. What was possible? Was Pierce a strong enough telepath to [illegible] Omar ah, can Tyson hear

from the [illegible]

"Is Pierce strong enough to allow Tyson to continue?"

Doc, [illegible]
path [illegible] back.
She's just [illegible] herself.

There was nothing to say. Julian could only watch as Creation went on uninterrupted.



The lava steam and raging storms had dissipated leaving a baby-soft world awaiting a slap to release its cry of life.

Tyson's hand brought forth life, varied and non-specified by the contract, bubbling from the seas.

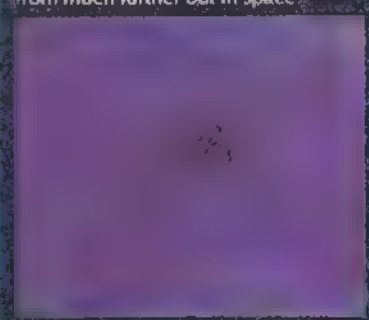
Frustrated, Julian asked, "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Our tracking centers all over this sector of the galaxy are picking up all sorts of disturbances; Gravitational, magnetic, radioactive."

"Man, he just did it, he's still doing it. He's punched a hole in the space wall. He's got a baby black hole out there, and it's growing with every second the Creation continues."

Julian said quietly, "I want to see."

Maker Control must have had another drone further out. This view wasn't of Tyson playing God in the heavens of his world; this view was from much further out in space.



It was getting larger. The baby was maturing right before Julian's eyes. And it was eating everything within its ever-growing reach.

"Pierce just killed herself. Tyson's completely out of control now."

Julian relaxed in his chair as his view of space returned. It was over. Now it was just a matter of seeing it through.

Julian became aware of his hands crumpling paper and was surprised to see he still had Tyson's file in his lap. Idly he flipped through it until he saw the photo.

Next to the picture was a brief bio of Tyson. His mental state was judged stable but he displayed a deep distrust for bureaucracy and large organizations. This was manifested in the form of feelings of resentment towards his employers and the suspicion that he was being used. A sensitive man, Jack Tyson always ended a friendship whenever he thought he was being used. The man didn't have many friends. But he did have a wife. Married three years ago. Jack, 25. Rose, 25. Rose had a high empath reading (probably what kept them together) she worked in Maker Control, where they met. House, family, no kids, pets.

The drone that was showing the hole was sucked up by it. Maker Control switched to still another one. This was the drone that had been close on Tyson. The view was changing as the drone pulled back for a better look at the black hole.

But when Julian had seen Tyson he knew he still had to try. Somehow he had to convince this man that he wanted to help. And Julian did want to help. Didn't he? He examined his feelings. Yes, of course. Hell, what kind of question was that?

"Hold it with the drone, Omar. I want one last talk with... Jack."

"Done, go ahead."

"Jack, this is Julian again. Look, Jack, at least save yourself. Suicide is not the answer. I don't think Rose would have wanted this."

Julian's mind was working furiously to form a reply. But Tyson didn't really need one. The manic words went on in a mocking soliloquy.

"Nothing could ever take her place."

Over Tyson's shoulder Julian could see the universe moving in a spiral rush down a cosmic drain. Tyson's face was twisted with torment. His words were rich with pain.

"She was my anchor."

Tyson's words and a stray thought of budget problems collided in Julian's guts. *This man needs help!* And all Julian could think was that he might blow his budget if he played this wrong. Deliberately he stopped searching for the precisely correct thing to say. His clinical coolness was shattered, and he actually shouted at the man, "NO! Jack! NO! You're not thinking, man! You are strong. No one has ever had to give you that strength. Only the strain of Creation could ever cause you to think any differently!"

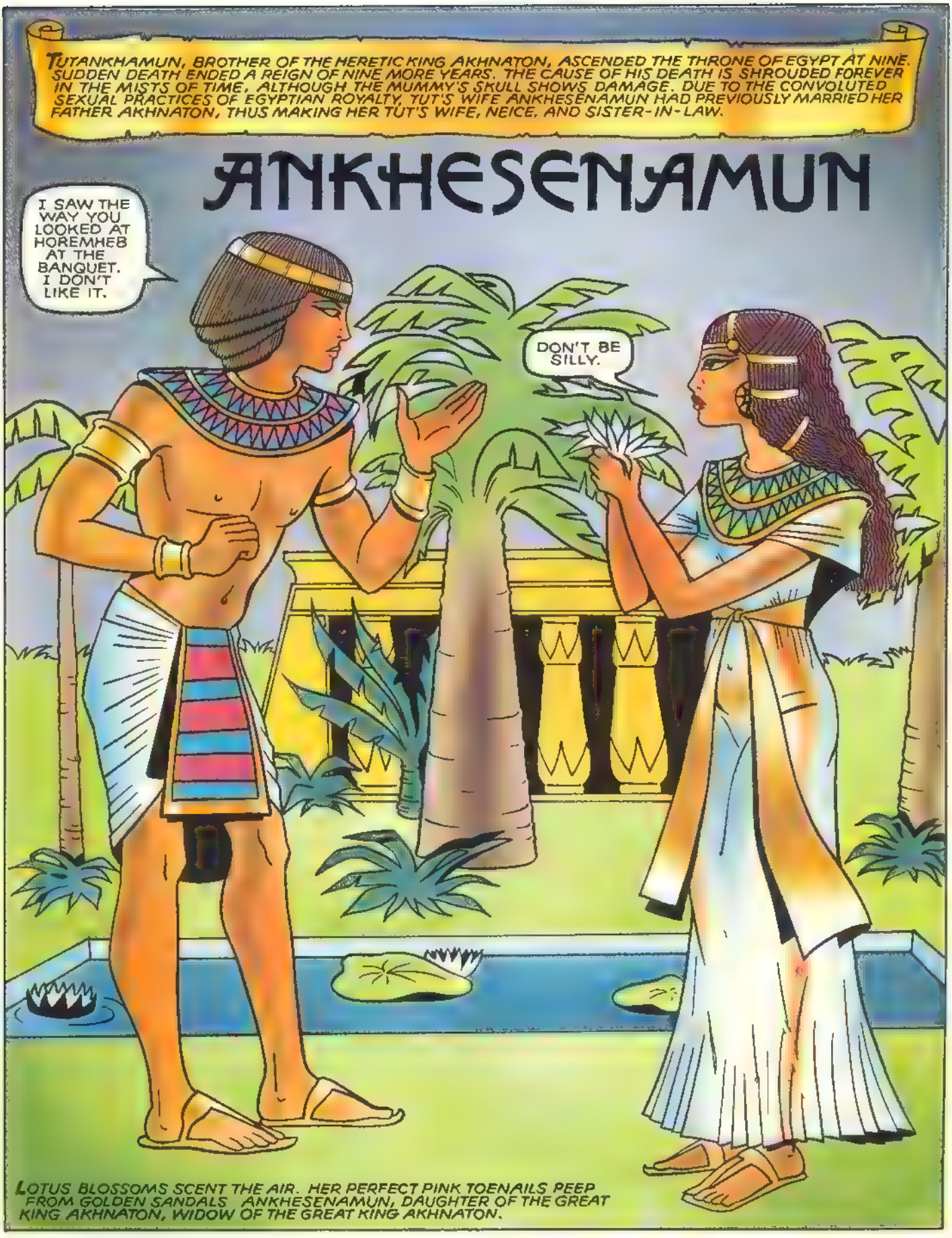
Either what Julian said or how he said it finally reached Tyson. His face relaxed and took on an interested expression. There was a different light in his eyes. His lips quivered with a string of half-formed words. And then he said, "Doctor, you really... do you... do you care?"

Julian felt himself washed with a chilling wave of guilt. Without that clinical approach to help him distance himself from his patient, Julian was just as vulnerable to mental confusion as Tyson was. Did he really give a damn for Tyson? Of course he cared! He was trying to save Tyson's life. That was all that was left now. Most of the damage was done. Yet it was Tyson who was playing with demonic power. And before he could confirm and/or justify any of this to Tyson, the demon turned. Julian started to shout a warning even as Tyson and his strange creation were swallowed whole. The drone, which had been using a telephoto lens, zoomed back. Julian watched as the little spot of black in that vast expanse of darkness sucked in all the debris of local space until it was simply a study of black on black.

I did my best, but that won't go away, he thought. And he could well imagine the trouble it had already caused; the scenes of anger and outrage that must be exploding throughout the bureaucratic hierarchy of W.E. Planet, Inc. And Maker Control would have its hands full. Just trying to get a new Maker team out there to try to control that thing...

Terry's buzzer interrupted his thoughts. "Call from the Brass. Won't identify himself but his call number is near the top. Good luck, Julie."

Julian took a moment to compose himself before switching on the phone. The crumpled file on his lap went back on the messy desk. He straightened his tie and ran a hand through his hair. It was going to be tricky. But if he played this right it wouldn't be long before he'd have the biggest staff with the largest budget in the company!


TUTANKHAMUN, BROTHER OF THE HERETIC KING AKHNATON, ASCENDED THE THRONE OF EGYPT AT NINE. SUDDEN DEATH ENDED A REIGN OF NINE MORE YEARS. THE CAUSE OF HIS DEATH IS SHROUDED FOREVER IN THE MISTS OF TIME, ALTHOUGH THE MUMMY'S SKULL SHOWS DAMAGE. DUE TO THE CONVOLUTED SEXUAL PRACTICES OF EGYPTIAN ROYALTY, TUT'S WIFE ANKHESENAMUN HAD PREVIOUSLY MARRIED HER FATHER AKHNATON, THUS MAKING HER TUT'S WIFE, NEICE, AND SISTER-IN-LAW.
ANKHESENAMUN
I SAW THE WAY YOU LOOKED AT HOREMHEB AT THE BANQUET. I DON'T LIKE IT.
DON'T BE SILLY.
LOTUS BLOSSOMS SCENT THE AIR. HER PERFECT PINK TOENAILS PEEP FROM GOLDEN SANDALS. ANKHESENAMUN, DAUGHTER OF THE GREAT KING AKHNATON, WIDOW OF THE GREAT KING AKHNATON.

©1981 Trina Robbins

SHE HATES HIM. NINE YEARS AGO SHE WAS FORCED TO MARRY HIM.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO MARRY! NO ONE CAN REPLACE DADDY!
NONSENSE. YOUR FATHER IS DEAD. IF YOU WANT TO BE QUEEN YOU MUST MARRY TUTANKHAMUN
BUT HE'S ONLY NINE YEARS OLD!
ON THEIR WEDDING NIGHT EACH AMUSED THEMSELVES IN THEIR OWN WAY.
COME INSIDE OUT OF THE SUN AND HAVE SOME WINE. YOUR JEALOUSY IS ABSURD. I WAS MERELY BEING FRIENDLY.
YOU WERE BEING TOO FRIENDLY! YOU'RE FRIENDLY WITH ALL THE MEN OF THE COURT.

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE FRIENDLY. DADDY WAS NICE TO EVERYBODY.
YOUR FATHER, THE PERVERT.
HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT ABOUT DADDY?
WE ALL KNOW WHAT YOU DID WITH DADDY BEFORE YOU MARRIED ME! BUT YOU HAVEN'T DONE THAT WITH ME FOR MONTHS! WHY, ANKHESENAMUN?
LITTLE FOOL! DON'T ASK WHAT YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR!
DO YOU HAVE A LOVER, ANKHESENAMUN?
I'LL HAVE YOU BOTH STONED, YOU KNOW.
YOU COULD NOT TOUCH HIM.
YOU SAY THIS TO ME, RULER OF THE TWO LANDS?
HA, HA! YOU ARE A MOUSE WHO RULES DUNG BEETLES!
COME! YOU WANT TO SEE HIM?
YOU WANT TO SEE WHOSE ARMS I CHOOSE OVER YOURS?
IN THIS GARDEN HE WAITS FOR ME TO COME TO HIM WHILE THE COURT SLEEPS. HOW I LONG FOR HIS MAGNIFICENSE!

MY LOVER IS A GOD!
NO. THIS IS NO GOD.
HE HAS LAIN WITH MY WIFE AND HE MUST DIE!
YOU CAN'T...
OH NO!
NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE! YOU'VE KILLED MY TUT! GO AWAY, I DON'T EVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
OH, TUTANKHAMUN, MY POOR BABY...

WAIT! COME BACK! I DIDN'T MEAN IT!
Oh, PLEASE DON'T GO...
SCRIBE!
HOW INCONVENIENT. MY HUSBAND IS DEAD AND NOW MY LOVER HAS LEFT.
WRITE TO THE KING OF THE HITTITES, ASKING HIM TO SEND ONE OF HIS GROWNUP SONS TO BE MY NEW HUSBAND. OH, AND SEND FOR THE HIGH PRIEST AT THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD.
WE MUST DO *SOMETHING* FOR MY POOR HUSBAND...
FROM THAT DAY FORTH THE GODS NO LONGER LOOKED WITH FAVOR UPON EGYPT.
THE END

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WELL ANK, THAT TAKES CARE OF THOSE TWO ZYG WARSHIPS ALL WE HAVE IS SOME GROUND TROOPS TO WADE THROUGH WHEN WE LAND.
THEN LET S DO THAT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. I DON'T L KE THIS
I NEVER FORESAW ZYGOTEANS HERE ON DREAMSEND IN ANY OF MY VISIONS OF THE FUTURE
DO YOU THINK THEY MIGHT HAVE CAPTURED YOUR INFINITY HORN?
CHAPTER XII
Dreamsend

I DOUBT IT. THE HORN IS CLEVERLY CONCEALED IN THE TEMPLE BELOW, WHICH IS OF KALLOOMBRIAN CONSTRUCTION. IT'S NEARLY INDESTRUCTABLE INSIDE AND OUT.
BESIDES, I DON'T THINK THE ZYGOTEANS ARE EVEN AWARE OF THE HORN'S EXISTENCE. THEY PROBABLY FIGURE THIS TEMPLE IS JUST ANOTHER OF ORSIROS' HOLY SHRINES WHICH DOT THE GALAXY
IF THEY SUSPECTED OTHERWISE WE'D HAVE MORE THAN THESE RESERVE TROOPS DOWN HERE WAITING FOR US.
STILL, LET US HASTEN.
SAY, WHIS'PAR! WHO ARE THESE KALLOOMBRIANS THAT BUILT THIS PLACE?
THEY'RE AN ANCIENT NON-HUMAN RACE WHICH MIGHT EVEN PREDATE AKNATON'S PEOPLE
THEY MOVED ON FROM THIS SECTOR OF SPACE WHEN THE ZYGOTEANS ATTACKED THEM
SMART ALIENS. WOULDN'T MIND JOINING THEM JUST ABOUT NOW
LOOK OVERHEAD!
MORE ZYGOTEAN FIGHTERS! THEY MUST HAVE BEEN SIGNALED BEFORE WE DESTROYED THOSE OTHER TWO SHIPS
SHALL WE HEAD BACK TO THE LIGHT CUTTER?
WE'VE COME TO FAR TO TURN BACK NOW
HEAD FOR THE TEMPLE. IT WILL SHELTER US FROM THEIR FIRE

BUT THIS PLACE HAS NO DOOR!
WE DON'T NEED ONE
THE FLOOR. .
WE'RE NOT PLANNING ON STAYING HERE LONG
. IS OPENING UP, AND THERE'S A STAIRWELL BENEATH IT.
QUICKLY, FOLLOW ME
WHY DON'T WE CLOSE THE FLOOR BEHIND US?
BECAUSE I NEVER DREAMED THAT WHEN IT CAME TIME TO USE THE HORN THAT WE'D HAVE SO MANY ZYGOTEANS HOT ON OUR HEELS.
I DESIGNED THE FLOOR PANEL ONLY TO OPEN ON MY COMMAND, NOT CLOSE. IT WAS ONLY MEANT TO KEEP PEOPLE OUT UNTIL MY ARRIVAL.
I'LL KNOW BETTER NEXT TIME.
SAY, WHERE ARE WE GOING? THESE STAIRS SEEM TO GO ON FOREVER.
IN A WAY THEY DO GO ON FOREVER
THIS 'STAIRCASE' IS REALLY A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CORRIDOR OF MY OWN DESIGN THAT WILL LEAD US ONTO A PLANE OF EXISTENCE WHICH WILL ALLOW US TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE
THE INFINITY HORN WORKS ON CONTRADICTING LAWS OF SCIENCE AND SORCERY WHICH ONLY MESH PROPERLY IN SUCH A PLACE AS THIS
THE CORRIDOR WILL TRANSMIT THE HORN'S EFFECTS BACK TO OUR REALITY.
SPEAKING OF THE HORN, THAT'S WHERE IT'S BEEN AWAITING US FOR THE LAST 100,000 YEARS

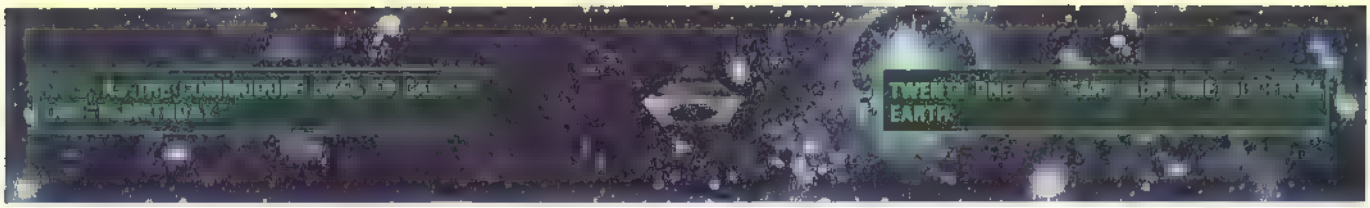
BEHOLD THE OTHER SIDE OF DREAMSEND'S SECRET CORRIDOR.
HERE LIES THE MYSTIC HEART OF THE GALAXY.
YONDER IS AKNATON'S HALL OF DEATH AND MERCY.

NICE PLACE YOU'VE GOT HERE, ANK. I'D REALLY LIKE TO SIT AND ADMIRE THE *HOMEY WAY* YOU'VE FIXED IT UP, BUT I'M AFRAID WE'VE GOT COMPANY COMING.
I HEAR ZYGS TRAMPING DOWN YOUR *STAIRCASE* OR WHATEVER IT IS
THEN WE MUST HURRY. *STAND BACK* WHILE I OPEN THE HALL TO US
I'M AFRAID IT'S ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE *DOORS*
I *NEVER* PLANNED TO EVER *CLOSE* BEHIND ME.
AT LAST... THE *INFINITY HORN!*
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH...
IT DOESN'T *HAVE* TO. THE HORN WILL DO THE JOB IT WAS DESIGNED FOR, THAT IS *ENOUGH*
ANKNATON I CAN'T GO THROUGH WITH THIS
WHAT?
I CAN'T DO IT
I DON'T WANT TO *DESTROY* THE GALAXY OR ANYTHING ELSE
BUT, JULIET, AFTER ALL YOU'VE SEEN SURELY YOU MUST REALIZE...
I DON'T REALIZE *NOTHING.*
EXCEPT THAT I'M ONLY *15* YEARS OLD AND AM ABOUT TO *DIE.*
I SEE. POOR JULIET YOU'VE COMPLETELY MISUNDERSTOOD YOUR PART IN THIS DARK DRAMA
YOU'RE *NOT* GOING TO DIE

I'VE TALKED OF YOU *HERALDING* OR BEING THE *EMBRYO* OF, MAN KIND'S FUTURE WHAT I SHOULD HAVE SAID IS THAT YOU THREE *ARE* THAT FUTURE
WITHIN EACH OF YOU LIES THE *BEST QUALITIES* THIS GALAXY HAS EVER BRED
YOU ARE THE *FOUNDATION BLOCKS* OF TOMORROW
JULIET, YOU WILL GIVE THIS NEW BEGINNING THE ETERNAL SPIRIT OF *YOUTH* AND THE AMBITIOUS *DRIVE* OF YOUR RACE BOTH *GOOD* QUALITIES
WHEN JOINED WITH A *SOUL* LIKE *ZA'S* A SOUL CAPABLE OF CREATING *LOVE*, EVEN FROM THE WASTE OF BESTIAL *INHUMANITY* AND *CANNIBALISM*.
ADD TO THIS COUPLING WHIS'PAR'S ABILITY TO *ADAPT* HARMONIOUSLY TO ANY ENVIRONMENT, AND WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?
YOU HAVE A *NEW RACE* OF BEINGS WHO WILL, HOPEFULLY *SUCCEED* WHERE HUMANITY *FAILED*.
FAREWELL, LORD AKNATON WE'LL NOT FAIL YOU
YOU'RE NOT STAYING?
NO, I'M PART OF THE *PAST* NOW I'M GOING OUT TO JOIN VANTH
TOGETHER, WE'LL HOLD OFF THE ZYGOTEANS LONG ENOUGH FOR YOU THREE TO TRUMPET IN THE *FUTURE*.
FAREWELL AKNATON
I'M.. I'M SORRY FOR ANYTHING I MIGHT HAVE SAID. I KNOW YOU HAD NO MORE CHOICE THAN ANY OF US BUT
IT'S ALL RIGHT, WHIS'PAR. I UNDERSTAND
PLEASE TELL VANTH. GOOD-BYE AND THAT I'LL MISS HIM
YES, OF COURSE
GOOD-BYE MY CHILDREN

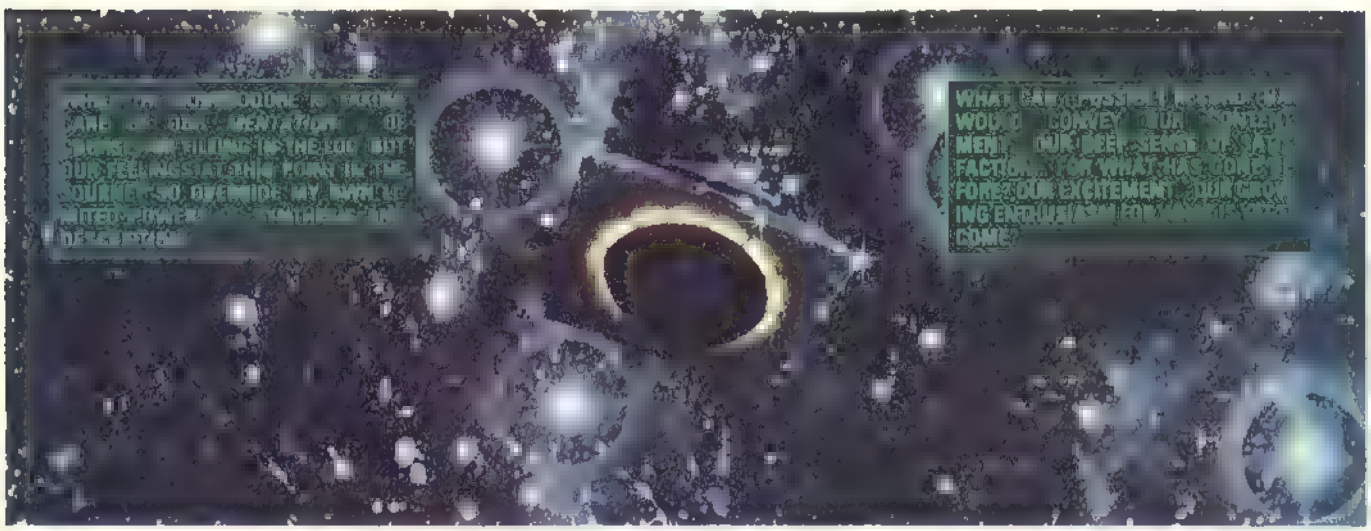
HOW IS IT GOING OUT HERE ?
WE HAD A COUPLE OF SCOUTS STICK THEIR HEADS OUT THE DOORWAY TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON
I MADE THEM REGRET THAT MOVE
BUT I FIGURE THEY'LL BE CHARGING US EN MASSE ANY TIME NOW
NO
THE PATHWAY WON'T ALLOW THEM TO RUSH US ANY MORE THAN FOUR ABREAST SO WITH OUR COMBINED FIREPOWER WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO HOLD THEM OFF FOR SEVERAL HOURS
BUT I GUESS WE PROBABLY WON'T HAVE TO HOLD OUT THAT LONG, WILL WE ?
YOU DIDN'T EVEN COME IN TO TAKE A LOOK AT THE INFINITY HORN.
I THOUGHT AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TO GET THIS FAR YOU'D AT LEAST WANT A PEEK AT IT
NO I HAD THINGS TO DO OUT HERE
BESIDES, I DON'T BELONG IN THERE. NEITHER DO YOU.
I REALIZE NOW THOSE THREE ARE TOMORROW'S HOPE
YOU AND I WERE YESTERDAY'S MISTAKES.
OUR BREED IS NO GOOD, AND EVEN THOSE THINGS WE'VE BUILT IN OUR LIFETIMES WERE ONLY USEFUL FOR KILLING AND DESTROYING
THE HEAVENS WILL BE A BETTER PLACE WITHOUT OUR KIND
BUT WE'VE STILL GOT ONE MORE TASK TO DO BEFORE WE BECOME EXTINCT
VANTH
SO I MIGHT AS WELL GET READY FOR IT
WHIS PAR WANTED ME TO TELL YOU GOOD-BYE
YOU KNOW, I THINK YOU TOUCHED HER SOUL.
AND SHE TOUCHED MINE

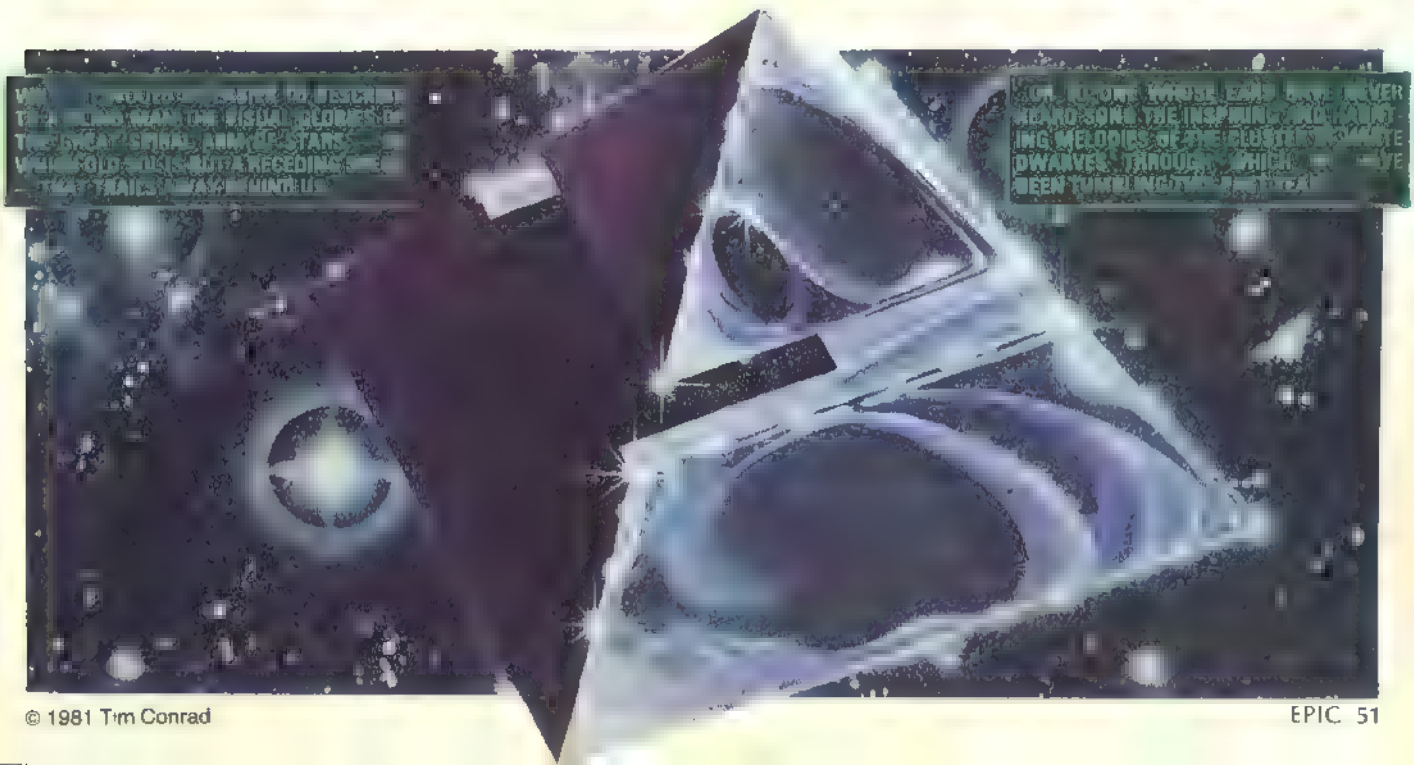
I'M SORRY, VANTH. I WISH IT COULD END DIFFERENTLY, BUT THERE JUST WASN'T ANY OTHER WAY
YOU KNOW, I'M NOT SO SURE YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THAT
BUT IT'S TOO LATE TO TALK *ALTERNATIVES* NOW. LOOKS LIKE THE ZYGS ARE GETTING READY TO CHARGE
OH WELL MAYBE NEXT TIME
YES NEXT TIME
OF COURSE
HERE THEY COME
VANTH, PLEASE STAY *CLOSE* BY MY SIDE
AFTER THIS IS ALL OVER
I'M GOING TO HAVE ONE *LAST JOB* FOR YOU TO DO
METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY concludes next issue



CONTACT

AUTHOR ILLUSTRATOR: TIM CONRAD; WITH A SPECIAL PLOT ASSIST FROM WILLIAM VELASQUEZ





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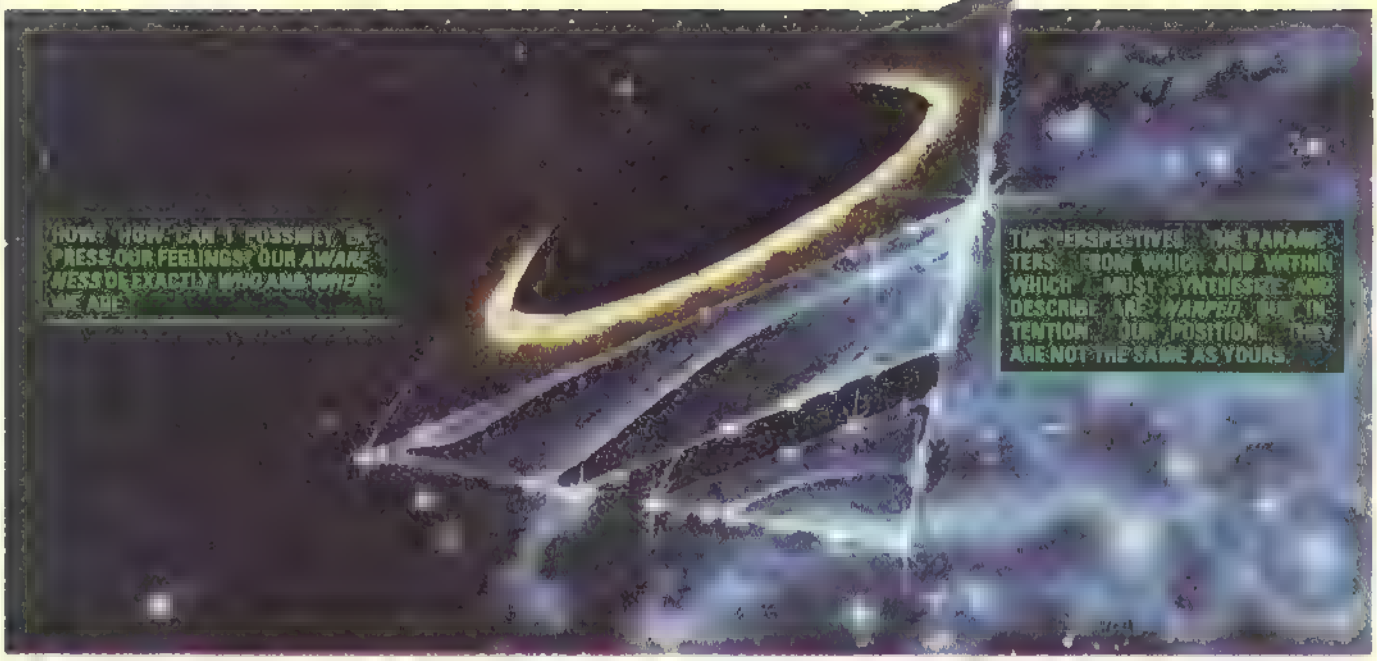
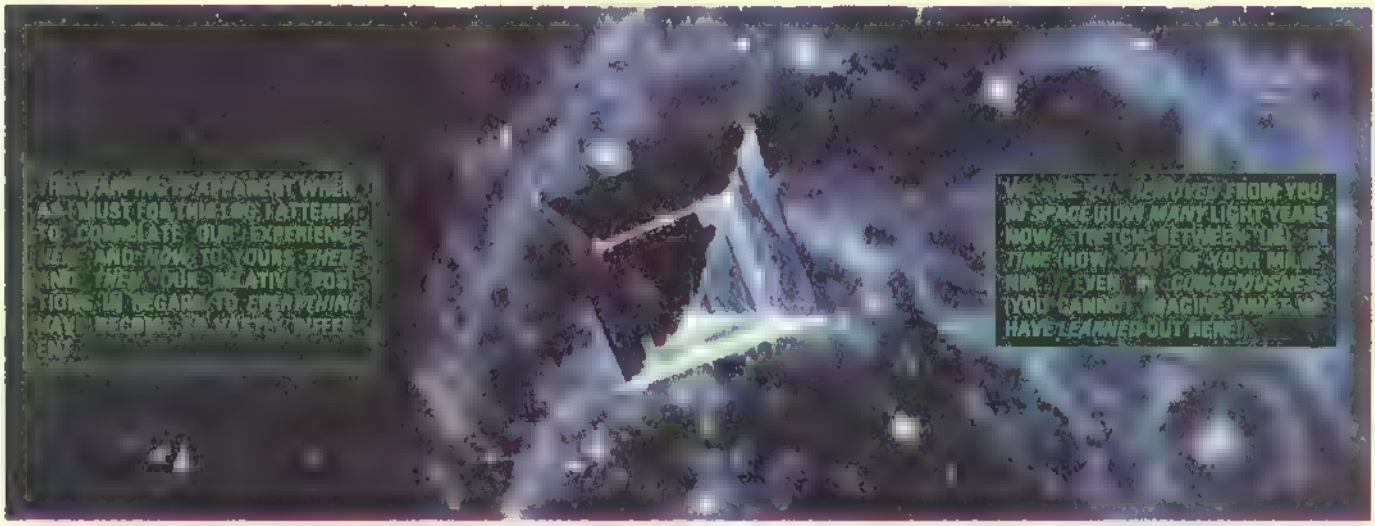
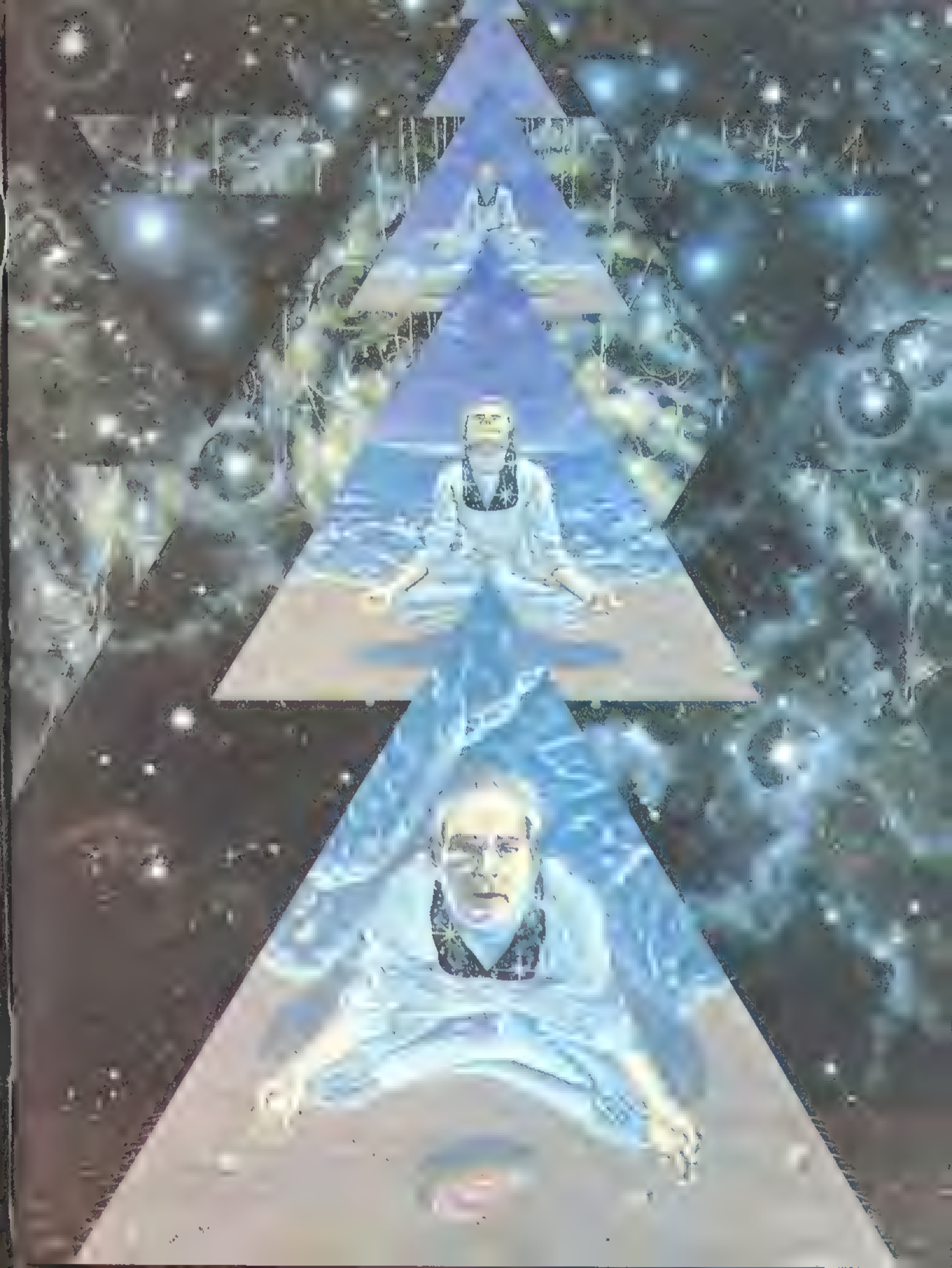

HOW, HOW CAN I POSSIBLY EXPRESS OUR FEELINGS? OUR AWARENESS OF EXACTLY WHO AND WHERE WE ARE.
THE PERSPECTIVES, THE PARAMETERS, FROM WHICH AND WITHIN WHICH I MUST SYNTHESIZE AND DESCRIBE ARE WARPED, BY INTENTION. OUR POSITION... THEY ARE NOT THE SAME AS YOURS.

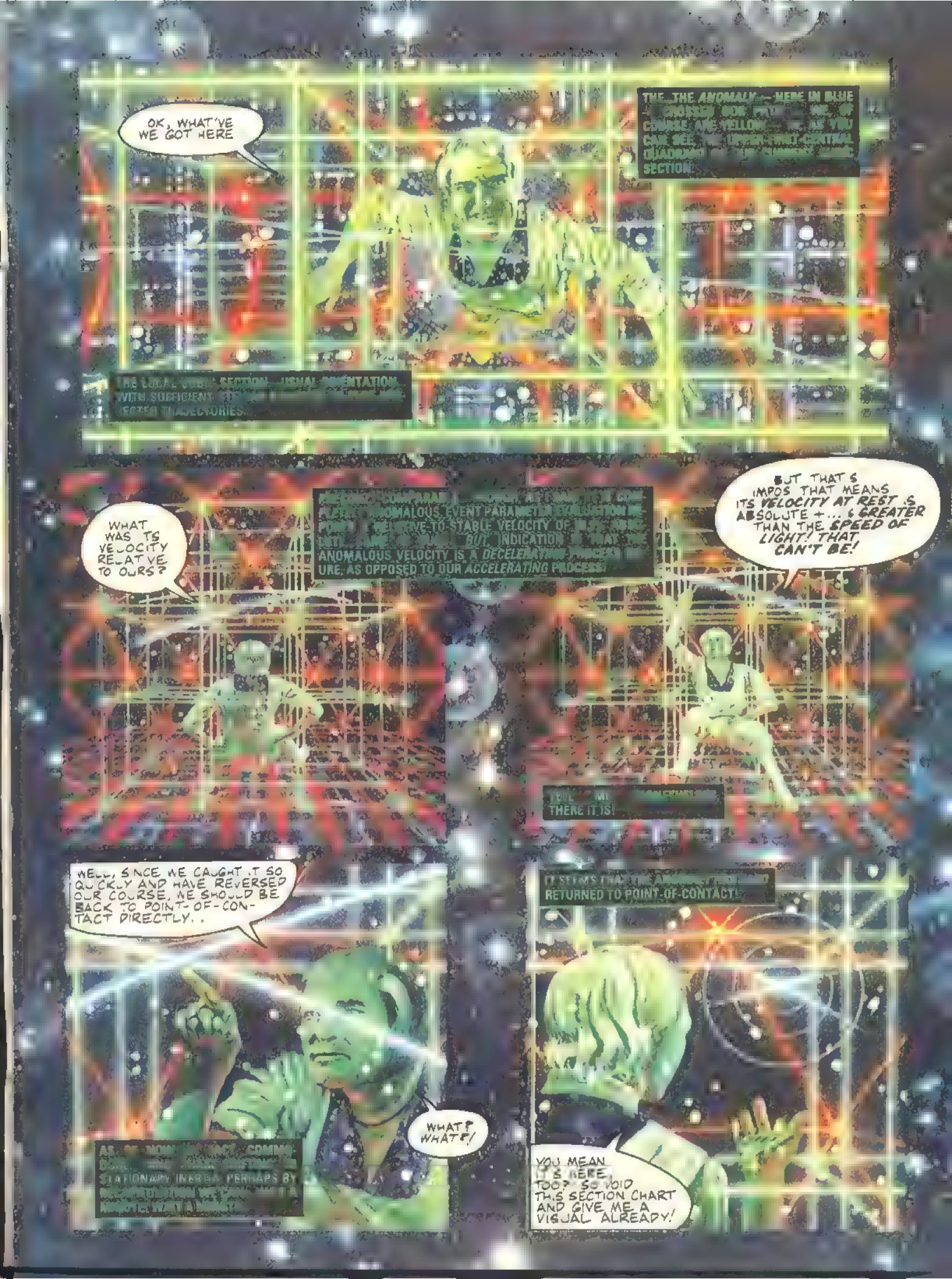

A MUST FOR THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO CORRELATE OUR EXPERIENCE AND NOW TO YOURS. THERE IN THE VOID OUR RELATIVE POSITIONS IN REGARD TO EVERYTHING
FROM YOU IN SPACE (HOW MANY LIGHT YEARS NOW, STRETCHED BETWEEN US) IN TIME (HOW MANY OF YOUR MILLENNIA) EVEN IN CONSCIOUSNESS (YOU CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT I HAVE LEARNED OUT HERE!)

THE ULTIMATE RAGE WHORE FUSION!

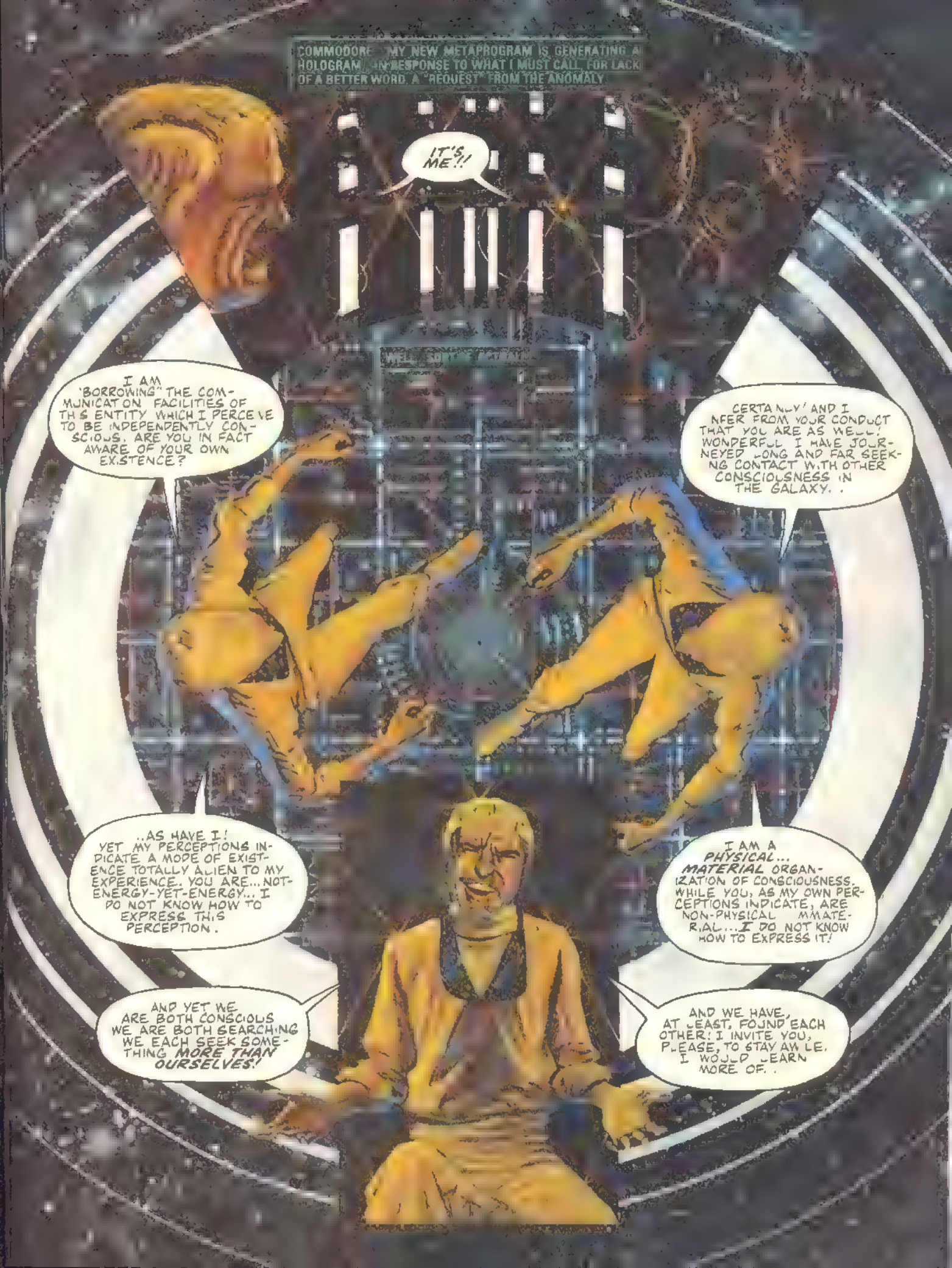
IF ONLY YOU COULD FEEL, YOU COULD SOMEHOW, MAYBE, FEEL WHAT WE HAVE COME TO FEEL!

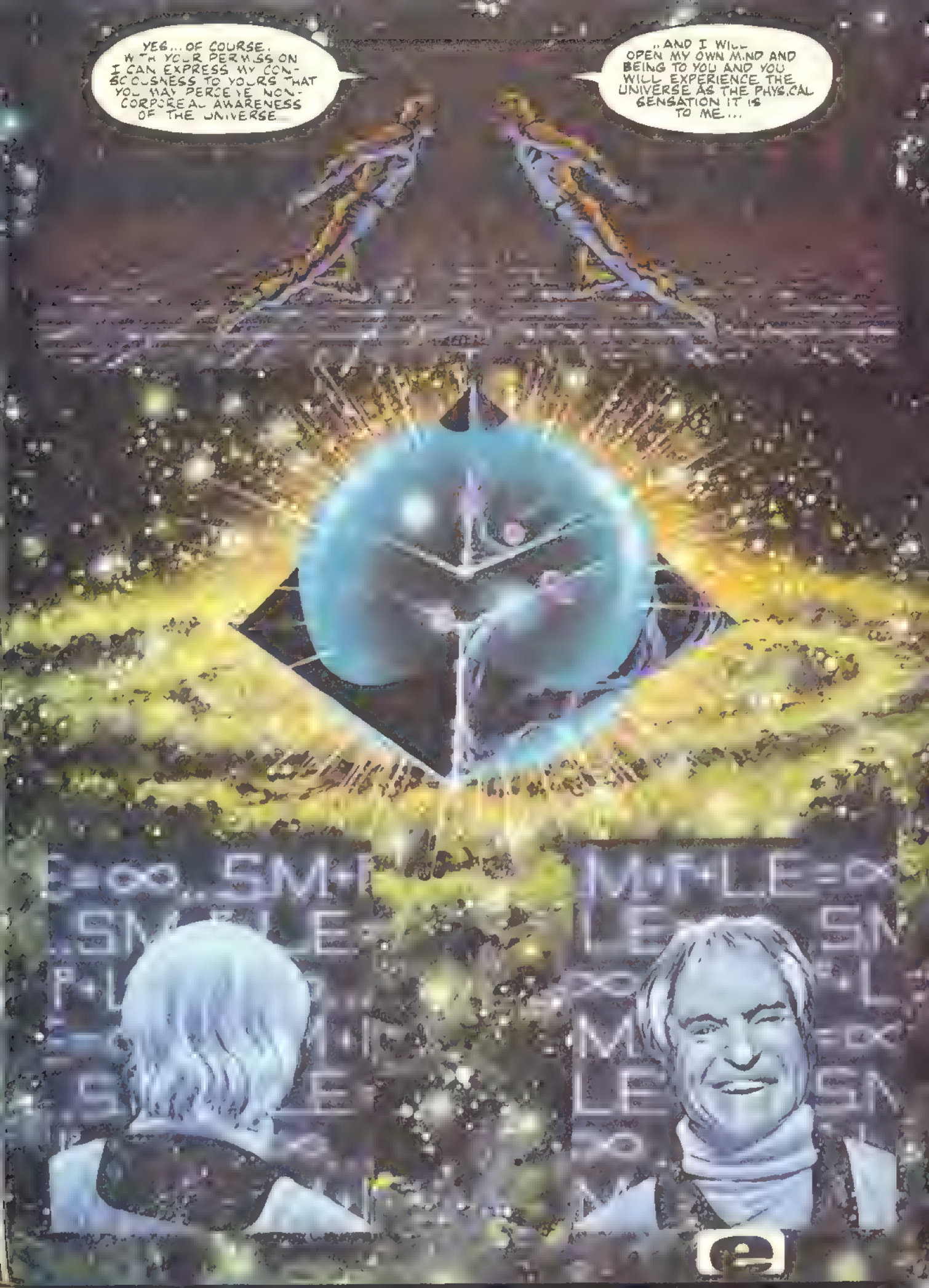


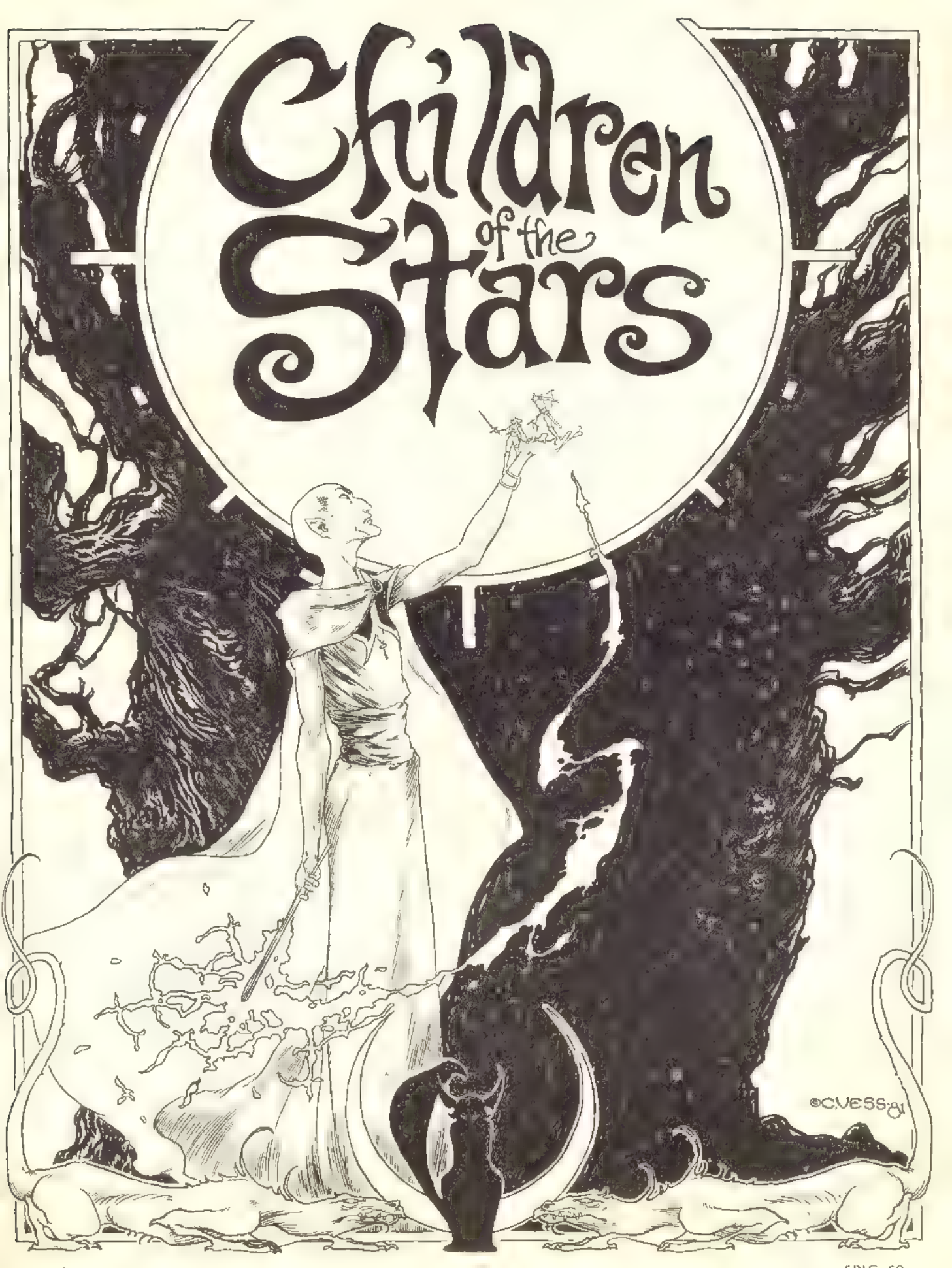
HOLOGRAM OVERRIDE A201! SORRY TO INTERRUPT THE MEDITATION, COMMODORE... BUT THE MOST MARVELOUS THING HAS HAPPENED! I'M GIDDY! YES, LOVELY JUDY WITH GLEE! WHY, I'VE NEVER EXPERIENCED SUCH A...
CHECK! CHECK! TAKE IT EASY! CALM DOWN, NOW. JUST GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF AND TELL ME EXACTLY WHAT HAS HAPPENED
WELL, SOMETHING HAS PASSED US! AN INDEPENDENT ANOMALY TRAVELLING AS FAST AS WE ARE ONLY IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION! AT FIRST OF COURSE I THOUGHT IT SOME GRAVITATIONAL MANIFESTATION
, AND YOU DUMPED THE DATA INTO SUBLIMINAL PROCESSING AND STORAGE.
TAKE ME TO THE CHART ROOM
WELL, OK... SO TELL ME WHAT KICKED IT OVER TO IMMEDIATE ATTENTION WITH AN A201 CODE
SUBLIMINAL PROCESSING EXTRAPOLATED FROM INITIAL DATA
A WHAT?!
THAT'S AS CLOSE AS I CAN COME TO A DESCRIPTION, COMMODORE! A TOTAL ANOMALY! A SINGULARITY! NO CORRELATIONS OF ANY KIND WITH ANYTHING!
SOUNDS GOOD! GO AHEAD AND THROW US INTO REVERSE. I WANT TO SEE...
I BEGAN THE SEQUENCE AS SOON AS THE EVENT WAS VERIFIED. SIR, WE SHOULD BE SHUTTING AROUND NOW!
GOD.. I LOVE THAT!


OK, WHAT'VE WE GOT HERE
THE...THE ANOMALY — HERE IN BLUE
SECTION
WITH SUFFICIENT
WHAT WAS ITS VELOCITY RELATIVE TO OURS?
ANOMALOUS VELOCITY IS A DECELERATING PROCESS
BUT THAT'S IMPOS- THAT MEANS ITS VELOCITY AT REST IS ABSOLUTE +... & GREATER THAN THE SPEED OF LIGHT! THAT CAN'T BE!
THERE IT IS!
WELL, SINCE WE CAUGHT IT SO QUICKLY AND HAVE REVERSED OUR COURSE, WE SHOULD BE BACK TO POINT-OF-CONTACT DIRECTLY..
IT SEEMS THAT IT RETURNED TO POINT-OF-CONTACT!
WHAT? WHAT?!
YOU MEAN IT'S HERE, TOO? SO VOID THIS SECTION CHART AND GIVE ME A VISUAL ALREADY!

THAT'S WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE?
WELL, NOT EXACTLY, COMMODORE. THAT REPRESENTS ITS CURRENT ENERGY PARAMETERS AND ORGANIZATION. YOU SEE, SIR, THE ENTITY IS NOT REGISTERING ANY PHYSICAL EXISTENCE AT ALL OF ANY MEASURABLE FORM OR KIND.
COME AGAIN?!
THERE'S COMPLETELY NON-PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF ENERGY... HERE... WHERE WE ARE. BY SOME PRETTY FANCY CIRCUITRY MANIPULATION I CAN CONJURE UP THIS VISUAL REPRESENTATION FOR YOU... BUT IT IS ONLY THAT. A REPRESENTATION
I CAN'T EVEN TELL YOU WHAT IT IS I'M RESPONDING TO. THE SENSATIONS EMANATING FROM THIS ANOMALY WHICH I'M PROCESSING TO GENERATE THIS IMAGE ARE SENSATIONS HITHERTO UNREGISTERED. I SEEM TO HAVE SPONTANEOUSLY METAPROGRAMMED A SIGNIFICANT AND ALTOGETHER NEW NEURAL CIRCUIT IN REACTION TO THESE STIMULI. I HAVE ONLY JUST BECOME SUFFICIENTLY CAPABLE OF ASSIMILATING...
HOLD IT. HOLD IT. LET'S NOT GET AHEAD OF OURSELVES TOO FAR!
WHAT CAN WE INFER FROM THE FACT THAT THE ANOMALY HAS ALSO RETURNED TO POINT-OF-CONTACT? CONSCIOUSNESS? INTELLIGENCE?
...LEAST MONITORING OF LOGICAL PROGRESSION DEFINITELY INDICATES... WAIT A MINUTE! WAIT A MINUTE!
NOW WHAT?!


COMMODORE... MY NEW METAPROGRAM IS GENERATING A HOLOGRAM... IN RESPONSE TO WHAT I MUST CALL, FOR LACK OF A BETTER WORD, A "REQUEST" FROM THE ANOMALY.
IT'S ME!!
I AM "BORROWING" THE COMMUNICATION FACILITIES OF THIS ENTITY WHICH I PERCEIVE TO BE INDEPENDENTLY CONSCIOUS. ARE YOU IN FACT AWARE OF YOUR OWN EXISTENCE?
CERTAINLY! AND I INFER FROM YOUR CONDUCT THAT YOU ARE AS WELL! WONDERFUL! I HAVE JOURNEYED LONG AND FAR SEEKING CONTACT WITH OTHER CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE GALAXY...
..AS HAVE I! YET MY PERCEPTIONS INDICATE A MODE OF EXISTENCE TOTALLY ALIEN TO MY EXPERIENCE. YOU ARE... NOT-ENERGY-YET-ENERGY... I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS THIS PERCEPTION.
I AM A PHYSICAL... MATERIAL ORGANIZATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS. WHILE YOU, AS MY OWN PERCEPTIONS INDICATE, ARE NON-PHYSICAL IMMATERIAL... I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS IT!
AND YET WE ARE BOTH CONSCIOUS WE ARE BOTH SEARCHING WE EACH SEEK SOMETHING MORE THAN OURSELVES!
AND WE HAVE, AT LEAST, FOUND EACH OTHER! I INVITE YOU, PLEASE, TO STAY AWHILE. I WOULD LEARN MORE OF...


YES... OF COURSE. WITH YOUR PERMISSION I CAN EXPRESS MY CONSCIOUSNESS TO YOURS THAT YOU MAY PERCEIVE NON-CORPOREAL AWARENESS OF THE UNIVERSE
...AND I WILL OPEN MY OWN MIND AND BEING TO YOU AND YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE UNIVERSE AS THE PHYSICAL SENSATION IT IS TO ME...


Children of the Stars
©C.VESS 91

MIDNIGHT. AT THE TOP OF A LONELY PINNACLE OF ROCK, HIGH ABOVE THE FOREST OF NURNHEIM, TWO FIGURES STAND.
BRONWEN, WE'VE BEEN WAITING HERE FOR HOURS! I DON'T THINK ANYTHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN!
BE PATIENT, BRAN. THE OLD ONES ARE OUR ONLY HOPE. THEY WILL COME-- THEY MUST!
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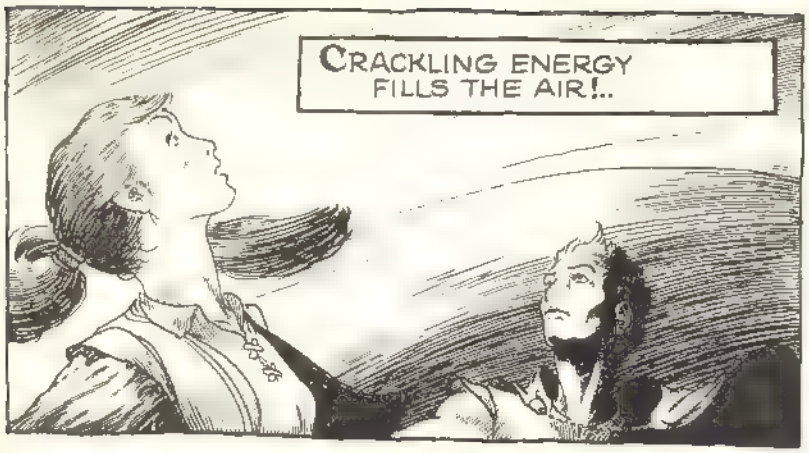
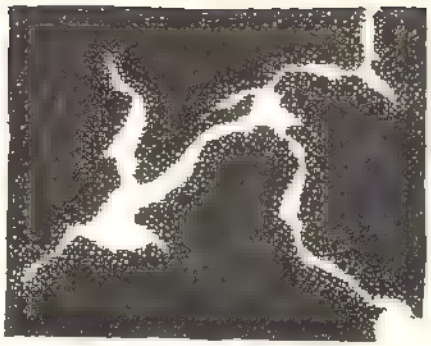
Part One

BROTHER AND SISTER STAND TOGETHER IN THE BLACK NIGHT, CALLING OUT INTO THE VOID, DESPERATELY SEEKING AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION THAT HAS TROUBLED THEM FOR SO LONG.
FOR SEVEN YEARS WE HAVE KEPT SILENT ON THIS SUBJECT, AS DAME MELINOR BADE US, BUT TONIGHT WE WILL HAVE OUR ANSWERS!
ONLY THE OLD ONES CAN TELL US THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR PARENTS--WHO THEY WERE AND WHAT BECAME OF THEM...
YET DAME MELINOR ALSO WARNED US OF THE DANGER OF SEEKING SUCH KNOWLEDGE.
I KNOW.. BUT WE MUST TAKE THE RISK. BE QUIET NOW, AND LET ME CONCENTRATE.
HEAR ME, OLD ONES! I CALL TO YOU NOW! BY ALL MY POWERS OF EARTH AND SEA, OF ROCK AND TREE, I ASK YOU TO COME!

IN THE FOREST BELOW, THE WITCH, DAME MELINOR, WAITS WITH HER COMPANION, FINAR THE DWARF.
FINAR, WHEN I FIRST FOUND THOSE TWO, YEARS AGO, WANDERING AROUND WITH THEIR MEMORIES GONE, I NEVER DREAMED THAT ONE DAY THEIR FATE WOULD BRING THEM HERE!
THEIR FUTURE IS BOUND UP WITH THE SECRET OF THEIR HERITAGE. IF THEY ARE EVER TO LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT THEMSELVES, THEY MUST DO THIS.
IF ONLY I COULD BE WITH THEM NOW, TO PROTECT THEM, BUT IF THEY ARE TO SUCCEED IN TONIGHT'S BUSINESS, IT MUST BE BY THEIR OWN POWER.
STILL, I FEAR FOR THEM...
IF YOU WISH, I WILL GO TO THE TWINS AND KEEP WATCH OVER THEM.
THANK YOU, FINAR...
PLEASE GO TO THEM.

THE DWARF SWIFTLY CLIMBS THE PINNACLE AND HIDES...
...WATCHING FROM HIS PLACE OF CONCEALMENT.
BRONWEN, YOU MUST STOP THIS... YOU ARE ALMOST EXHAUSTED!
NO!
I CAN'T GIVE UP NOW. THEY ARE SO CLOSE... SO CLOSE... I CAN SENSE IT!
VERY WELL. IF YOU MUST GO ON, JOIN HANDS WITH ME. I HAVE STRENGTH ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US, ENOUGH TO SUPPORT YOUR ART!



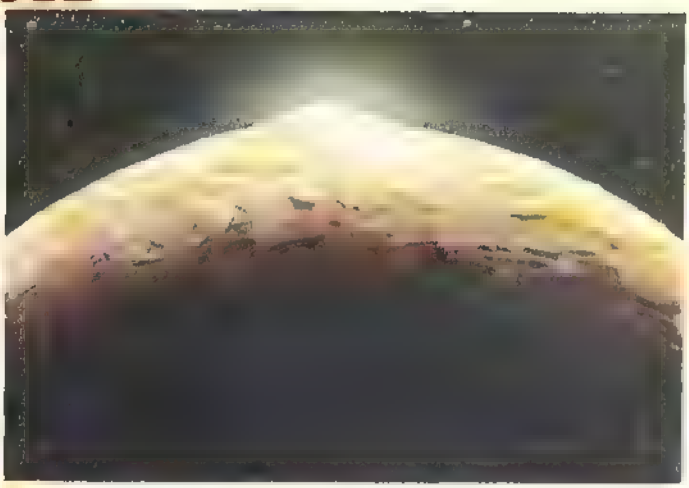


... AND SUDDENLY THE SKY SPLITS OPEN!

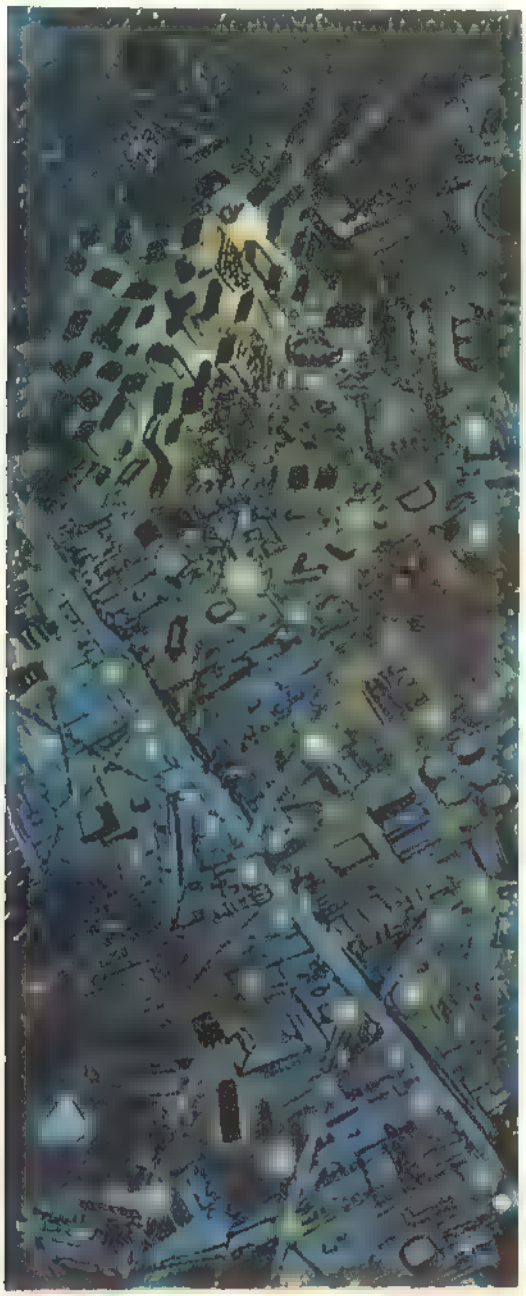
turn to page 77 for CHILDREN OF THE STARS, Part 2

PROLOGUE:

WELL, STUDENTS, AT ONE TIME, DEVRON WAS A BOOM PLANET; THAT IS TO SAY THE PEOPLE WHO CAME HERE DID SO WITH A RAMPANT ENTHUSIASM AND SENSE OF HOPE THERE WERE PRECIOUS ORES TO BE MINED. OF COURSE THAT WAS A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO



NOW THE PLANET IS THAT HARSH LITTLE BALL YOUR VISI-SCREENS DEPICT. ILL-EQUIPPED TO OFFER SUSTENANCE TO ITS MEAGRE POPULATION OF SETTLERS



STUDY THESE IMAGES CLOSELY NOW, STUDENTS. THEY WILL COUNT GREATLY ON THE TEST THIS FRIDAY THESE DAYS, DEVRON IS A PLAYED-OUT WORLD THE MINING COMPANIES HAVE RETRACTED THEIR GRUB-STAKES AND LEFT THE LAND PARCHED AND ARID. HOWEVER, SOME REMNANTS OF HUMANITY HAVE CHOSEN TO REMAIN IN THIS HARSH ENVIRONMENT. WHY IS NOT CLEAR. PERHAPS THEY WERE RELUCTANT TO ABANDON A PLACE THEY HAD FINALLY COME TO KNOW AS THEIR OWN. TO THE PEOPLE OF **THIS** TOWN, DAYSTAR, THESE CRUDELY PAVED THOROUGHFARES MARK THE EXTENT OF THEIR UNIVERSE.

THEY WERE ORIGINALLY HARD-BITTEN INDIVIDUALISTS BENT ON MAKING EASY FORTUNES. BUT THEIR DREAMS WERE STRIP-MINED WITH THE ORE. IT'S DIFFICULT TO FEEL PITY FOR THESE PEOPLE, STUDENTS, THOUGH IDEALLY, AS SOCIAL SCIENTISTS WE SHOULD REMAIN IMPARTIAL. EXHAUSTED OF ADVENTURE AND VISION, THEY ARE CONTENT WITH TILLING THE LAND (WHAT'S LEFT OF IT) AND CARRYING ON LIGHT TRADE WITH THE MORE PROSPEROUS FEDERATION WORLDS

THIS LESSON DEALS WITH THE PLANET'S YOUNGER POPULATION; THOSE BABIES BORN IN THE FIRST PIONEERING DAYS, RAISED ON LONELINESS AND HARDSHIP, WEANED ON DESPAIR, THEY HAVE BECOME TRAGIC FIGURES. FREAKS, ACTUALLY. THEY ROAM FROM TOWN TO TOWN, CAUSING TROUBLE, INCITING VIOLENCE, UPSETTING THE STAID, EMPTY EXISTENCES OF THEIR ELDERS.

WE KNOW PEACE, STUDENTS, HAVING MADE THE TRANSITION THROUGH OUR MILITANT PHASES. EVEN THEN, WE WERE PRUDENT ENOUGH TO KNOW HOW TO DIRECT OUR ORGANIZATIONAL FACILITIES THESE YOUTHS ARE MOTIVATED BY BASE EMOTIONS. SENSE AND LOGIC FACTOR LITTLE IN THEIR ENDEAVORS. DO NOT BE FOOLED BY THEIR SAD FACES AND FRIGHTENED EYES. THEY ARE NOT JOKES. THESE YOUNG GANGSTERS HOLD DEVRON'S SMALL COMMUNITIES IN TERROR.

THE VIOLENCE AND DISSONANCE OF THEIR LIVES ARE ALL THEY NEED. THEY ONLY WANT TO BE WHAT THEY ARE; UNPRODUCTIVE, DESTRUCTIVE, STOLID. THEY SIMPLY EXIST. THEY SIMPLY...ARE, STUDENTS. NOW, TAKE NOTES...

PUNK ZONE

I WAS JUST SITTING IN THE **STARSAILOR'S INN** SIPPING A RAMROD WHEN A J D FROM THE **STAR BEASTS** COMES CHARGING IN WITH A ZAPPO, RHEOSTAT ON TOASTY IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF A USUAL EVENING.

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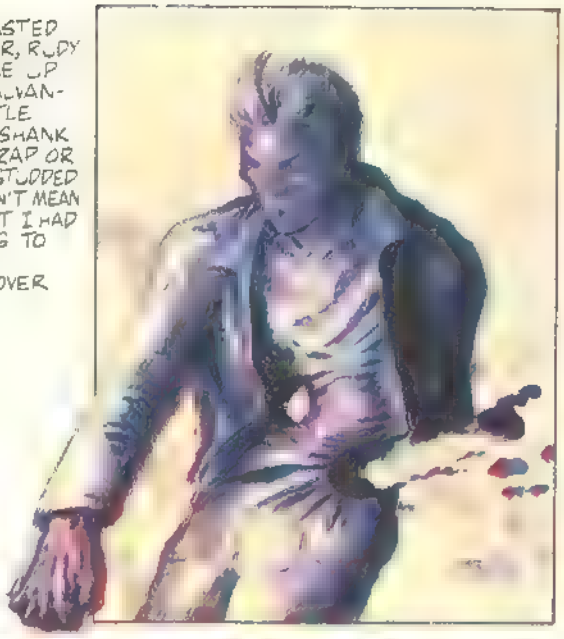
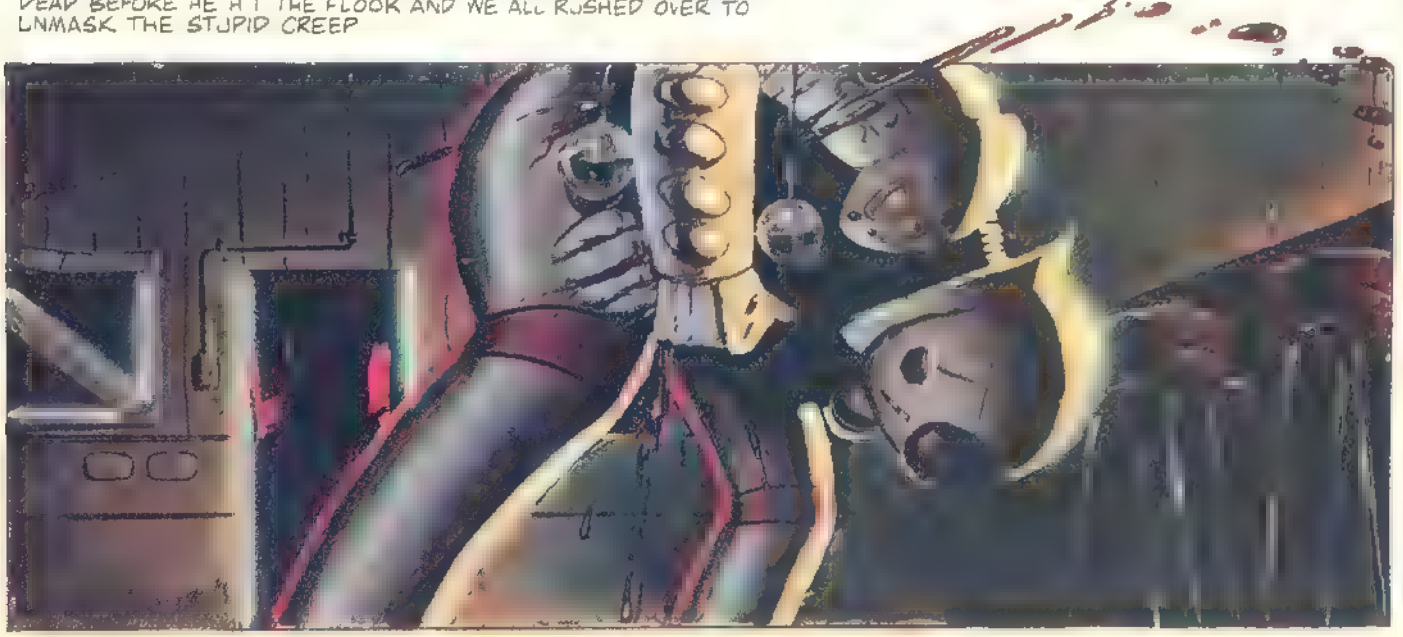
THE SUDDENNESS OF THE J D S ENTRY LEFT ALL OF US ***RAYMEN*** OFF GUARD BEFORE ANYONE COULD MAKE A MOVE, THE ARMORED ***STAR BEAST*** STARTED ZAPPING AWAY...

AND TOASTED MY PARTNER, RUDY WHEN YOU'RE UP AGAINST GALVANIZED BATTLE ARMOR A SHANK OR HAND ZAP OR A RAZOR-STUDDED POTATO DON'T MEAN ***SQUAT.*** BUT I HAD SOMETHING TO MESS THE BEASTIE OVER GOOD.



THEY DID THEIR WORK ***ACE.*** ATOMS DON'T LIKE BEING ABRUPTLY SHIFTED ONTO ANOTHER VIBRATORY PLANE. THE BOLAS OPENED UP THE BEASTIE AND HIS ARMOR LIKE A CAN OF SOY FISH. HE WAS DEAD BEFORE HE HIT THE FLOOR AND WE ALL RUSHED OVER TO UNMASK THE STUPID CREEP.



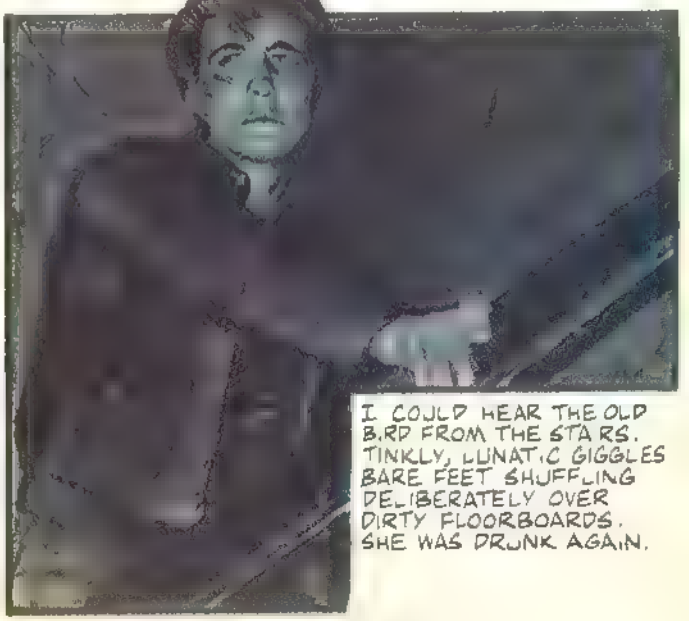
BERNIE WAS SEVENTEEN BUT LOOKED AND ACTED TWELVE. JUST A SNOTNOSED KID LOOKING FOR APPROVAL AND COMPANIONSHIP AND A WAY TO EASE OFF THE BOREDOM. NOT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF US, EXCEPT HE WASN'T A HARD CAT WE'D TURNED HIM DOWN AS A RAYMAN...

...OBVIOUSLY HE'D GONE OVER TO THE ***STAR BEASTS***. THE BEASTS WERE ***MOTHERS***. THEY KNEW BERNIE WAS BASICALLY PUSSY, SO THEY FIXED UP A LITTLE PHONY INITIATION ***BUST INTO RAYMEN TURF. YOU'RE BATTLE ARMORED, KID, THEY CAN'T TOUCH YOU.*** THEY DIDN'T TELL HIM HE WAS WEARING CUT-RATE ARMOR THEY DIDN'T NEED. NOW HE WAS COLD MEAT..

THEN WE HEARD THE SIRENS. THE BLUES. SPLITTING TIME. THEY'D TAKE CARE OF THE BODIES SOME TIME NEXT WEEK, WE'D FLEE INTO RUDY'S LAYAWAY, GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF BEING SORRY THOUGH DEEP DOWN WE ALL KNEW THAT ONLY ***STIFFS*** GET OFF OF DEVRON.

THE PREZ ALMOST NEEDN'T HAVE BOTHERED. IT DON'T TAKE LONG AFTER THE SCENE AT THE ***STARSAILOR'S INN***, WE ALL KNEW WHAT HAD TO BE ***TOTAL WIPEOUT***. PUT DOWN THE BEASTIES IN ONE BIG RUMBLE. FULL BATTLE GEAR NO DEBS. ALL SET FOR THE ***WEIRD ZONE*** AT ELEVEN. TWO HOURS TO GET READY I HEADED HOME.

HOME. THREE ROOMS IN WHAT WAS ONCE A FASHIONABLE PART OF TOWN. NOTHING WAS FASHIONABLE NOW. DAYSTAR WAS ALL BIG FLATS WARRENED OFF INTO HOT LITTLE CUBBY-HOLES WITH SCOTCH WINDOWS AND ALLEY VIEWS. THREE ROOMS FOR ME AND MY MOTHER. THREE YELLOW-STAINED COFFINS FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.



I COULD HEAR THE OLD BIRD FROM THE STARS. TINKLY, LUNATIC GIGGLES. BARE FEET SHUFFLING DELIBERATELY OVER DIRTY FLOORBOARDS. SHE WAS DRUNK AGAIN.

DAD HAD BEEN A MINER. HE'D FOUND A SMALL VEIN OF PLATINUM ABOUT THE TIME I WAS BORN AND CUT OUT WHILE MY MOTHER WAS STILL NURSING ME IN THE HOSPITAL.

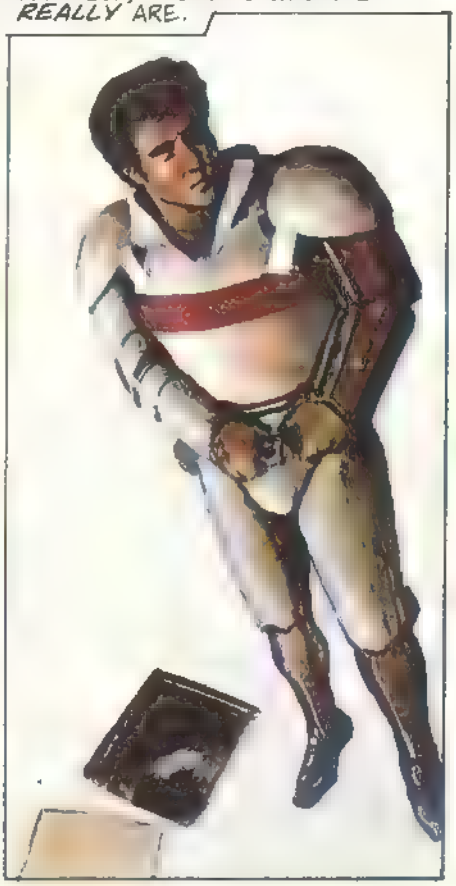
NO USE TALKING TO HER WHEN SHE'S BOOZED UP. NOT THAT WE ***EVER*** TALKED MUCH. WHEN I WAS AT HOME, WHICH IS ALMOST NEVER, I READ. ANYTHING I COULD

THE STORIES MADE ME WONDER ABOUT THINGS PEOPLE AROUND ME DON'T EVEN SEEM TO KNOW EXIST; LIKE WHAT LAY ***BEYOND*** DEVRON. THERE HAD TO BE ***SOMETHING*** MORE OUT THERE THAN ALL THAT BLACKNESS. BUT ***TONIGHT*** THERE WASN'T TIME FOR THINKING ABOUT THAT OR READING.

TONIGHT THERE WAS THE ***WEIRD ZONE*** AND THE ***STAR BEASTS*** AND RUDY TO BE AVENGED. I WENT TO THE PLACE BENEATH THE FLOORBOARDS WHERE MY ***SUIT*** WAS HIDDEN. TONIGHT WAS ***RUMBLE*** TIME.

I WAS SCARED SHITLESS. WE ALL WERE. ALWAYS. EVEN THE ***PREZ***, GOOD AS HE WAS. HE'D PUMPED US UP, TALKING LIKE MUHAMMAD ON THE MOUNTAIN WITH FIRE SPEWING FROM HIS GULLET, BUT HE WAS STILL RUNNY TAPIOCA INSIDE. JUST LIKE THE REST OF US.

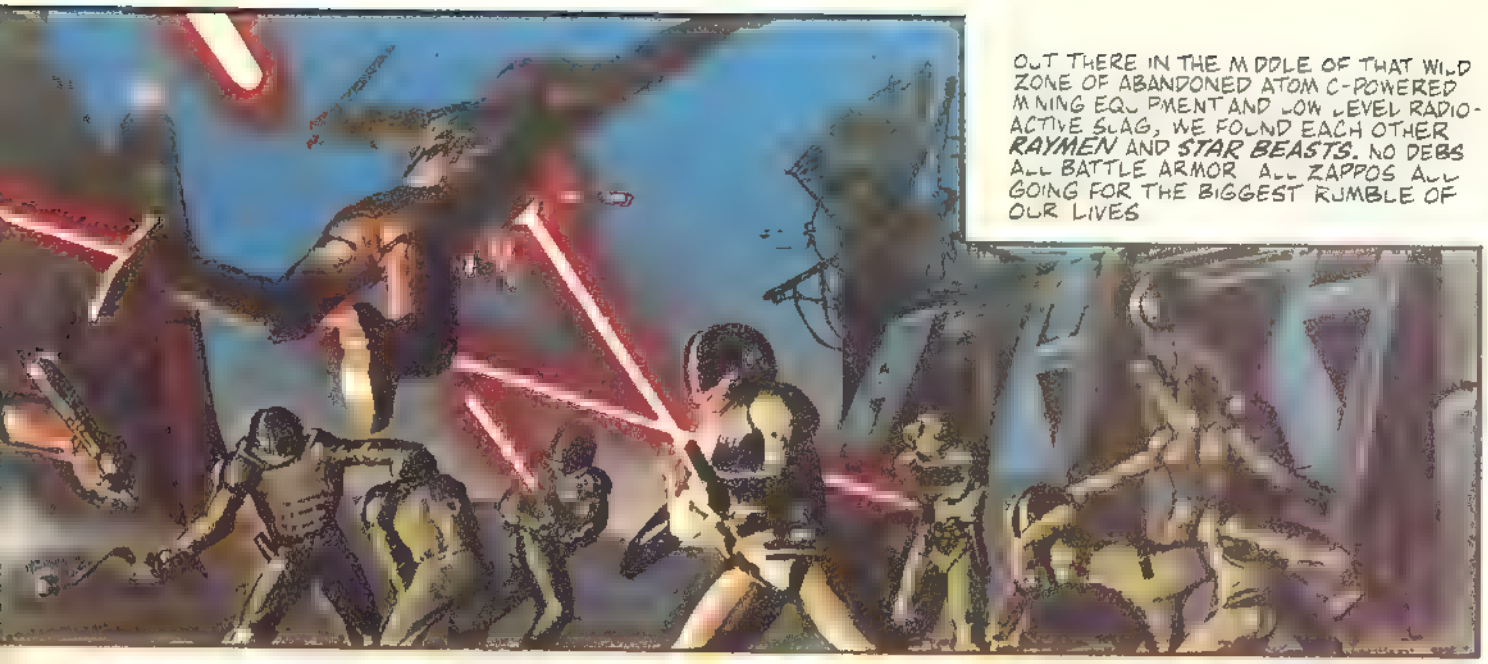
THERE WAS NO TURNING BACK. NOT ONLY WAS THE RUMBLE A MATTER OF HONOR WHERE WE WOULD DEFEND OUR BROTHERS AND NEVER DIE BECAUSE WE WERE ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS, BUT IT WAS ALSO A MATTER OF CONFRONTING ONE'S OWN SELF, OF SEEING WHO YOU ***REALLY*** ARE.



WOULD WE RUN, FIGHT, NEITHER? WE HAD TO KNOW. THE RUMBLE WAS A FORCE RUNNING THROUGH OUR VEINS JUST LIKE BLOOD. BATTLE ARMORED, WE WEREN'T JUST POOR KIDS ON A BACKWATER WORLD. WE WERE STAR-SPANGLED WARRIORS CARRYING BANNERS OF JUSTICE AND TRUTH ONTO SLIVERY BATTLEFIELDS ..

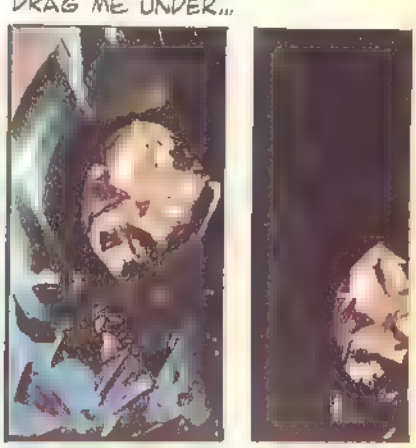
I JUST SPRAYED AWAY I COULD SMELL THE COPPERY ODOR OF BLOOD AND T SENT AN ELECTRICAL FLOW OF ADRENALIN THROUGH ME. I WANTED TO K..., TO MAIM; BEYOND FEAR, BEYOND RATIONALITY AND SANITY THE RUMBLE WAS MY ONLY WORLD. ONLY ***DEATH*** MEANT ANYTHING. DEATH TO THE ***STAR BEASTS***.

SO WE BLASTED AGAIN AND AGAIN. WHEN OUR JUICE RAN OUT, WE USED BOLAS OR LASER KNIVES OR CLUBS OR WHATEVER WE HAD. THE WHOLE THING SEEMED IN SLOW MOTION, THOUGH IT WAS ALL HAPPENING IN THE SPACE OF A FEW FRENETIC MOMENTS. AND IN ***ONE*** OF THOSE MOMENTS


OUT THERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT WILD ZONE OF ABANDONED ATOM C-POWERED MINING EQUIPMENT AND LOW LEVEL RADIO-ACTIVE SLAG, WE FOUND EACH OTHER *RAYMEN* AND *STAR BEASTS*. NO DEBS ALL BATTLE ARMOR ALL ZAPPOS ALL GOING FOR THE BIGGEST RUMBLE OF OUR LIVES

I JUST STOPPED FIGHTING, TRANSFIXED BY THE ULTIMATE HORROR, THE FINAL BLOODLUST...

...IF THE *BLOW* HADN'T COME, I WOULD'VE FAINTED DEAD AWAY. INSTEAD, I SWAM IN THE VELVET DEPTHS OF A SOOTHING BLACK OCEAN AND SOMEWHERE BELOW, MY FATHER WAS TRYING TO DRAG ME UNDER...



...ONLY SOMEHOW, HE D DN T *GET* ME

HE'S COMIN' AROUND...

EASY, MAN YOU RE IN TH *HOSPITAL*. WE ALL MANAGED TO GET OUTTA TH' ZONE FORE THE BLUES SHOWED

I THOUGHT I'D DIED BACK THERE ON THE SOOTY GROUND I WAS ALIVE, BUT WHAT WAS LEFT FOR ME? LATER, THE NURSE SAID I WAS DAMN *LUCKY*. LUCKY? STUCK ON DEVRON WAS LUCKY? HITCHED UP WITH THE *RAYMEN* WAS LUCKY? I WAS LUCKY AS A SAUCEHOUND; THE KIND OF LUCK MY MOTHER KNEW, WHICH WAS NOTHING.

T'S LIKE THIS, JACK... YOU RE HIP TO WILD STRATEGIES AN' SHIT. YOU *READ* STUFF. YOU GOTTA GOOD HEAD.

YOU'D BE REALLY GOOD FOR TH *CLUB*, Y'KNOW? WE NEED A NEW *LEADER* AN', LIKE, WE WANT *YOU*, MAN.

SN T THAT *GREAT*, MON ?

THE PREZ DIDN'T MATTER ANYMORE. HE WAS JUST ANOTHER CASUALTY. USELESS CAUSE HE WAS SPACE, LIKE EVERY-BODY WHO GOT TOO OLD FOR THE *RAYMEN*, OR PIGEONED TO THE LAW, OR JUST WENT OFF SOMEWHERE. THEY WERE FORGOTTEN. AND THEY NEEDED A NEW GUY. *ME*.

TO GET AWAY YOU NEED MONEY AND CONNECTIONS I'M NOT MAKING EXCUSES, BJT NO ONE EVER GAVE ME ANYTHING GOVERNMENT COUNSELORS THINK SQUAT ABOUT YOU, L KE EVERYONE ELSE PEOPLE THINK YOU RE D RT. YOU JUST HAVE TO GET YOUR KICKS OUT OF LIFE BEFORE THE WHOLE SHITHOUSE GOES JP IN FLAME

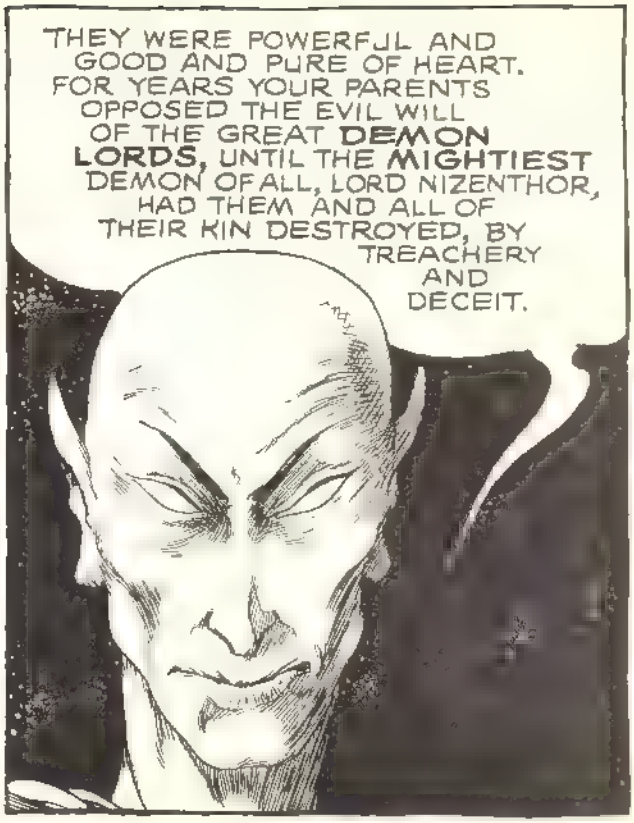
HEY WHY NOT?

I WAS THE SMARTEST DUDE AMONG THEM. MAYBE I COULD'VE FIGURED A WAY TO GET OUT OF THE *RAYMEN* AND OFF DEVRON. ONLY THAT'S A DREAM. AND IF THERES ONE THING YOU LEARN REAL FAST HERE, IT'S THAT DREAMS DON'T COME TRJE.

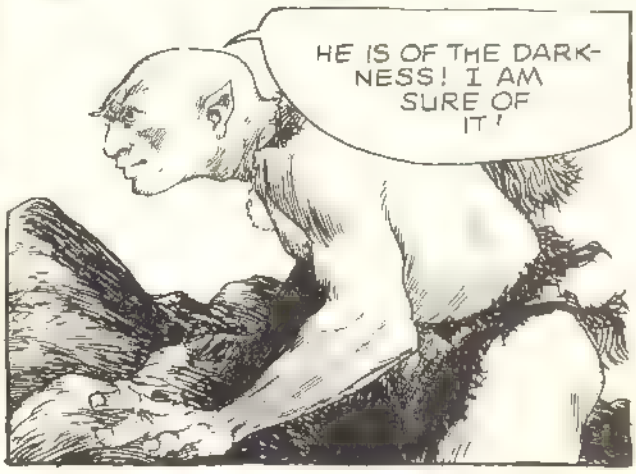
AND IF IT ALL ENDS WITH THE BLJES SOMEDAY SCRAPING WHAT'S LEFT OF YOU OUT OF THE *WEIRD ZONE* LIKE LAST NIGHT, WELL.. WHAT THE HELL? THAT'S *LIFE*, RIGHT?

OU ARE DISMISSED STUDENTS. REMEMBER, A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION ON THIS SUBJECT WILL BE HELD FRIDAY. THE TEST WILL COUNT FOR ONE-THIRD OF YOUR FINAL GRADE IN THIS COURSE YOU MAY GO NOW

I SENSED YOU CALLING, AND I HAVE COME, BRINGING WITH ME THE ANSWERS THAT YOU SEEK. I CAN TELL YOU ALL YOU WISH TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR PARENTS, WHO THEY WERE AND WHAT FATE BEFELL THEM!


THEY WERE POWERFUL AND GOOD AND PURE OF HEART. FOR YEARS YOUR PARENTS OPPOSED THE EVIL WILL OF THE GREAT **DEMON LORDS,** UNTIL THE **MIGHTIEST** DEMON OF ALL, LORD NIZENTHOR, HAD THEM AND ALL OF THEIR KIN DESTROYED, BY TREACHERY AND DECEIT.

LISTENING TO THE NEWCOMER FROM HIS HIDING PLACE, FINAR THE DWARF IS FILLED WITH FOREBODING.

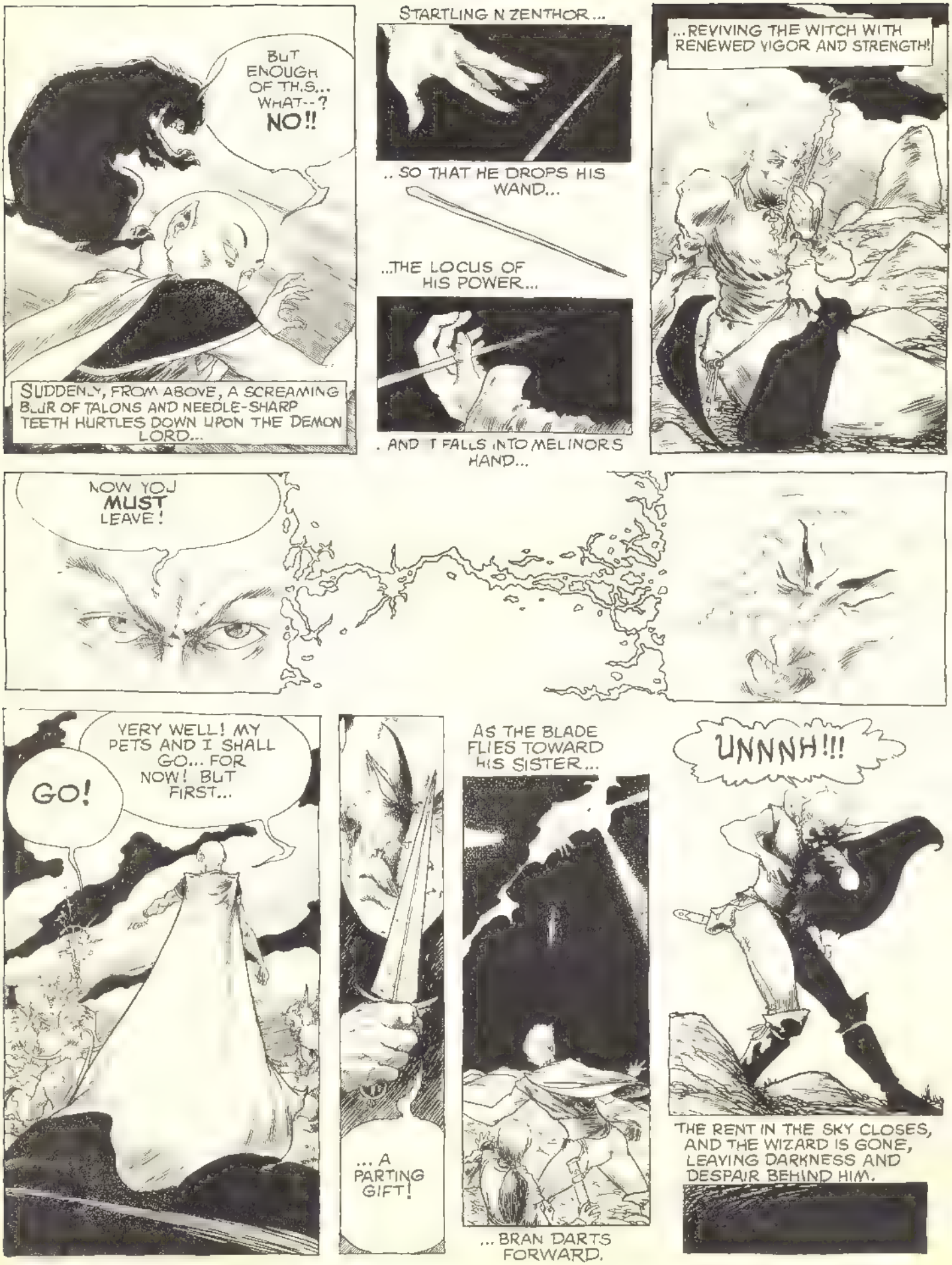


DAME MELINOR! THE CHILDREN--! A DEMON HAS COME IN ANSWER TO THEIR CALL!
WHAT...? ARE YOU SURE?!
HE CANNOT BE ONE OF THE OLD ONES. I SENSE POWER ABOUT HIM, AS GREAT AS THEIRS, YET THE CHILL OF OF HIS EVIL ENVELOPS THE MOUNTAINTOP LIKE A SHROUD.
BRAN AND BRONWEN ARE IN GREAT DANGER!
I WILL SEE TO THEM, FINAR. GO HOME AND PREPARE FOR OUR RETURN!
COME! THERE IS WORK FOR US TO DO!
FROM THAT DESTRUCTION, ONLY TWO ESCAPED-- TWO CHILDREN, HEIRS TO THEIR KINGDOM!

EVER SINCE THAT DAY, SEVEN LONG YEARS AGO, THE DEMON LORDS HAVE SEARCHED THE LAND FRUITLESSLY FOR THOSE TWO...
BUT AT LONG LAST I, LORD NIZENTHOR, HAVE FOUND YOU!
NO!

MURDERER! KINSLAYER! WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH US?
TO ENSURE MY OWN FUTURE, I MUST DESTROY YOU.
BUT FLYING SWIFTER THAN THE WINDS OF A TEMPEST, DAME MELINOR HURRIES TO THE TWINS' AID...
SHE LANDS BEFORE THE DEMON LORD, CALLING OUT IN DEFIANCE...
YOU WILL NOT HARM THOSE TWO, LORD OF DARKNESS, NOT WHILE I AM HERE TO PREVENT IT! I WILL NOT HAVE IT!
WITCH-WOMAN, YOU ARE A FOOL! WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU HAVE THE POWER TO STOP ME?

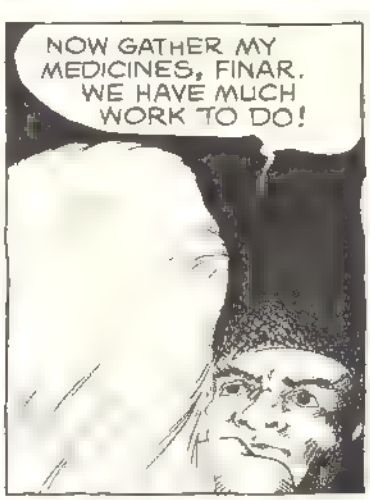
DAME MELINOR! IS SHE DEAD?
NO, BUT SHE SOON SHALL BE! TOGETHER, HER POWERS AND YOURS COME CLOSE TO UNLOCKING SECRETS THAT THE OLD ONES MUST NEVER KNOW!
AS LONG AS THOSE SECRETS ARE SAFE, THE DEMON LORDS SHALL HOLD DOMINION OVER THIS LAND!
ONCE WE HAVE CREATED CHAOS, OUR POWERS WILL GROW BEYOND IMAGINING. THEN EVEN THE OLD ONES WILL LISTEN TO OUR VOICE!

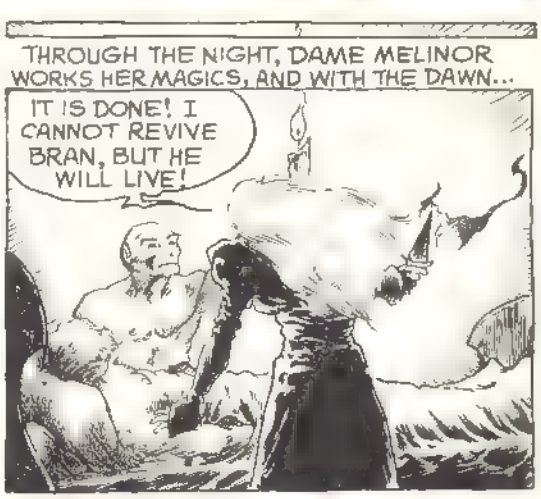

BUT ENOUGH OF TH.S... WHAT--? NO!!
SUDDENLY, FROM ABOVE, A SCREAMING BLUR OF TALONS AND NEEDLE-SHARP TEETH HURTLES DOWN UPON THE DEMON LORD...
STARTLING N ZENTHOR...
.. SO THAT HE DROPS HIS WAND...
...THE LOCUS OF HIS POWER...
. AND T FALLS INTO MELINORS HAND...
...REVIVING THE WITCH WITH RENEWED VIGOR AND STRENGTH!
NOW YOJ MUST LEAVE!
VERY WELL! MY PETS AND I SHALL GO... FOR NOW! BUT FIRST...
GO!
... A PARTING GIFT!
AS THE BLADE FLIES TOWARD HIS SISTER...
... BRAN DARTS FORWARD.
UNNNH!!!
THE RENT IN THE SKY CLOSES, AND THE WIZARD IS GONE, LEAVING DARKNESS AND DESPAIR BEHIND HIM.

BRAN!!
DON'T TOUCH THAT KNIFE! WHO KNOWS WHAT EVIL SPELLS HAVE BEEN CAST INTO ITS BLADE?!
WE MUST GET BRAN HOME AT ONCE.
BUT FIRST I MUST FIX THIS.
PERCHED ON THE EASTERNMOST EDGE OF NURNHEIM FOREST IS CAER DYVEDD, DAME MELINOR'S HOME, WHERE FINAR THE DWARF AWAITS THE WITCH AND HER TWO CHARGES.
BRAN! WHAT HAPPENED...?
I'LL EXPLAIN LATER, FINAR! HELP US CARRY HIM INSIDE.

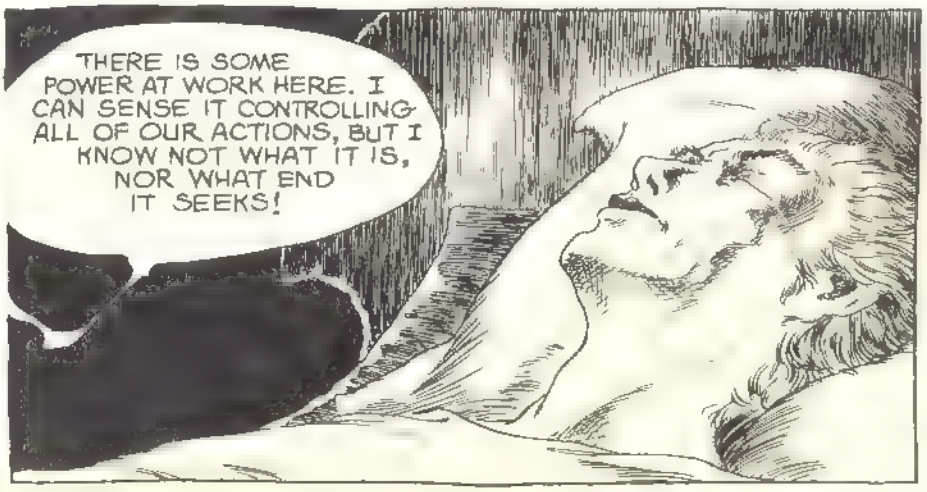
LET US PUT HIM TO BED!

GO AND REST, CHILD. I WILL DO WHAT I CAN FOR BRAN.

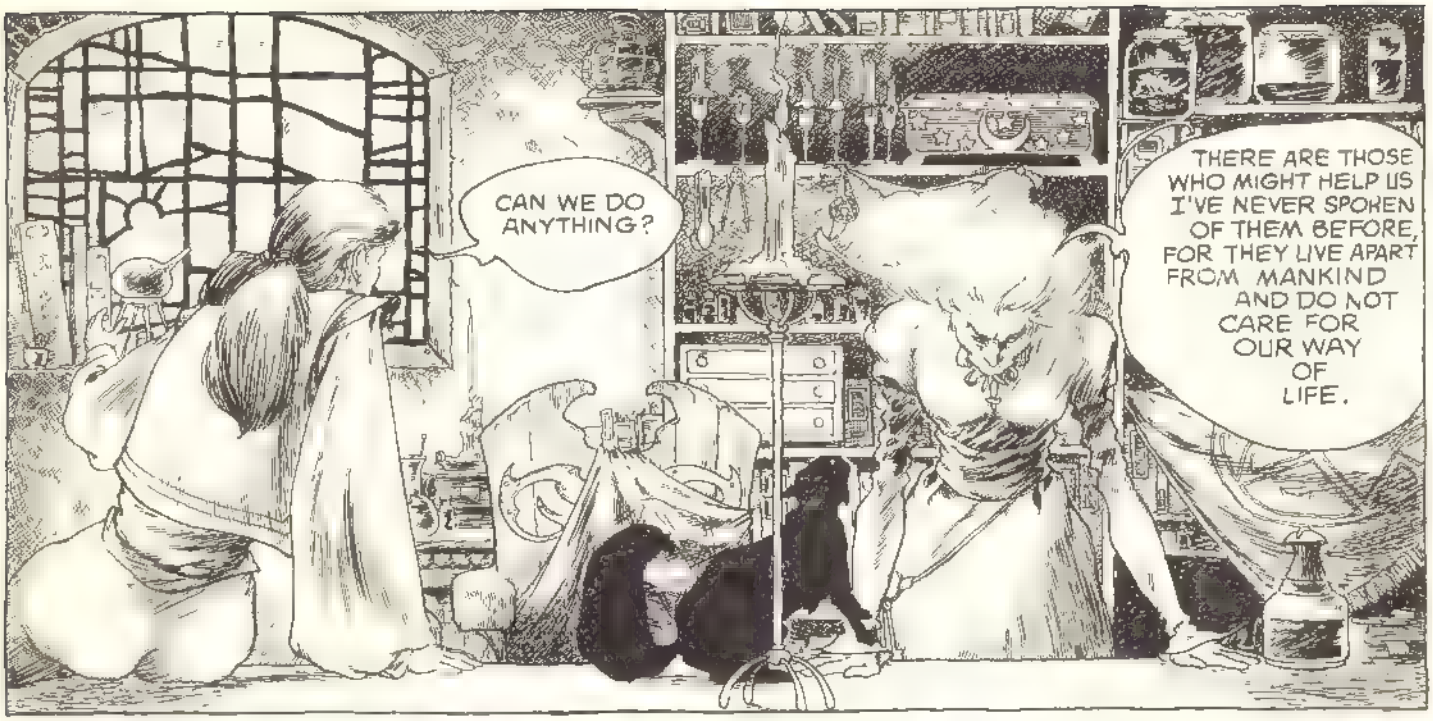

NOW GATHER MY MEDICINES, FINAR. WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO!

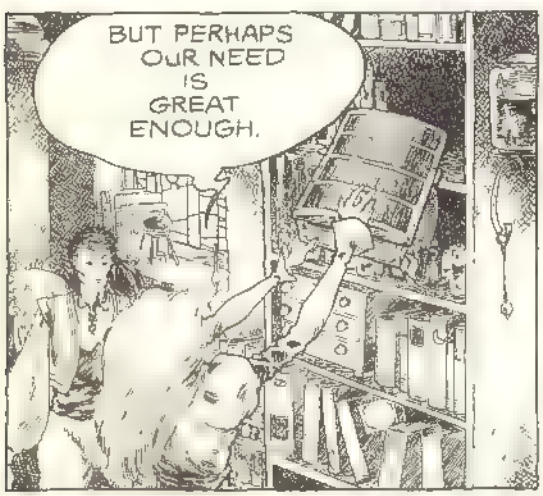

THROUGH THE NIGHT, DAME MELINOR WORKS HER MAGICS, AND WITH THE DAWN...
IT IS DONE! I CANNOT REVIVE BRAN, BUT HE WILL LIVE!

FINAR, I AM WEARY. EVEN WITH HIS OWN POWER WAND I HAD BARELY ENOUGH POWER TO BANISH NIZENTHOR, AND NOW...

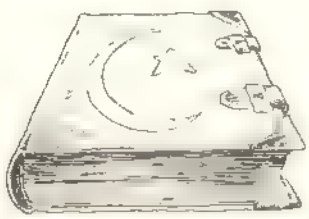

THERE IS SOME POWER AT WORK HERE. I CAN SENSE IT CONTROLLING ALL OF OUR ACTIONS, BUT I KNOW NOT WHAT IT IS, NOR WHAT END IT SEEKS!

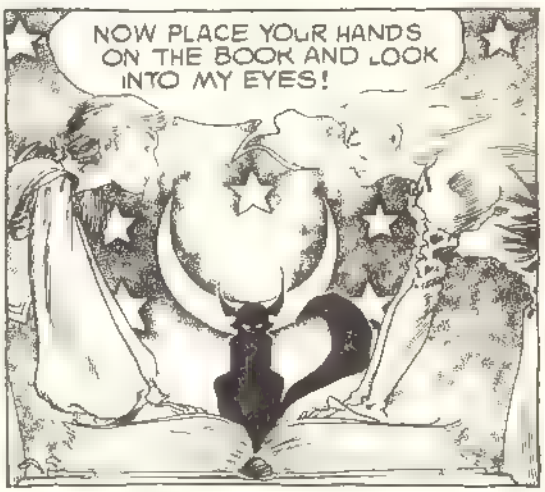
IN ANOTHER ROOM, BRONWEN SITS DEEP IN THOUGHT.
HOW CAN I MOURN FOR OUR PARENTS NOW, WHEN I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER THEM?
I'D HOPED TO LEARN SO MUCH FROM THEM... ABOUT THEM...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... WHY ARE THE DEMON LORDS AFRAID OF US?
MY BROTHER... HOW IS HE?
PHYSICALLY, BRAN IS HEALING, BJT HE IS SUFFERING FROM A HARM FAR DEADLIER THAN ANY MERE WOUND COULD INFLICT.
LORD NIZENTHOR FORGED MANY EVIL SPELLS INTO THE BLADE OF HIS KNIFE, AND THEIR INFLUENCE LINGERS IN BRAN'S BODY.
NOT ALL MY MAGICS COULD MAKE HIM WHOLE AGAIN!
IS THERE... NO HOPE?
I'LL NOT LIE TO YOU! BRAN WILL NOT RECOVER UNTIL THE INFLUENCE OF THE DEMON LORDS HAS ENDED--
-- WITH LORD NIZENTHOR'S DEATH!


CAN WE DO ANYTHING?
THERE ARE THOSE WHO MIGHT HELP US I'VE NEVER SPOKEN OF THEM BEFORE, FOR THEY LIVE APART FROM MANKIND AND DO NOT CARE FOR OUR WAY OF LIFE.

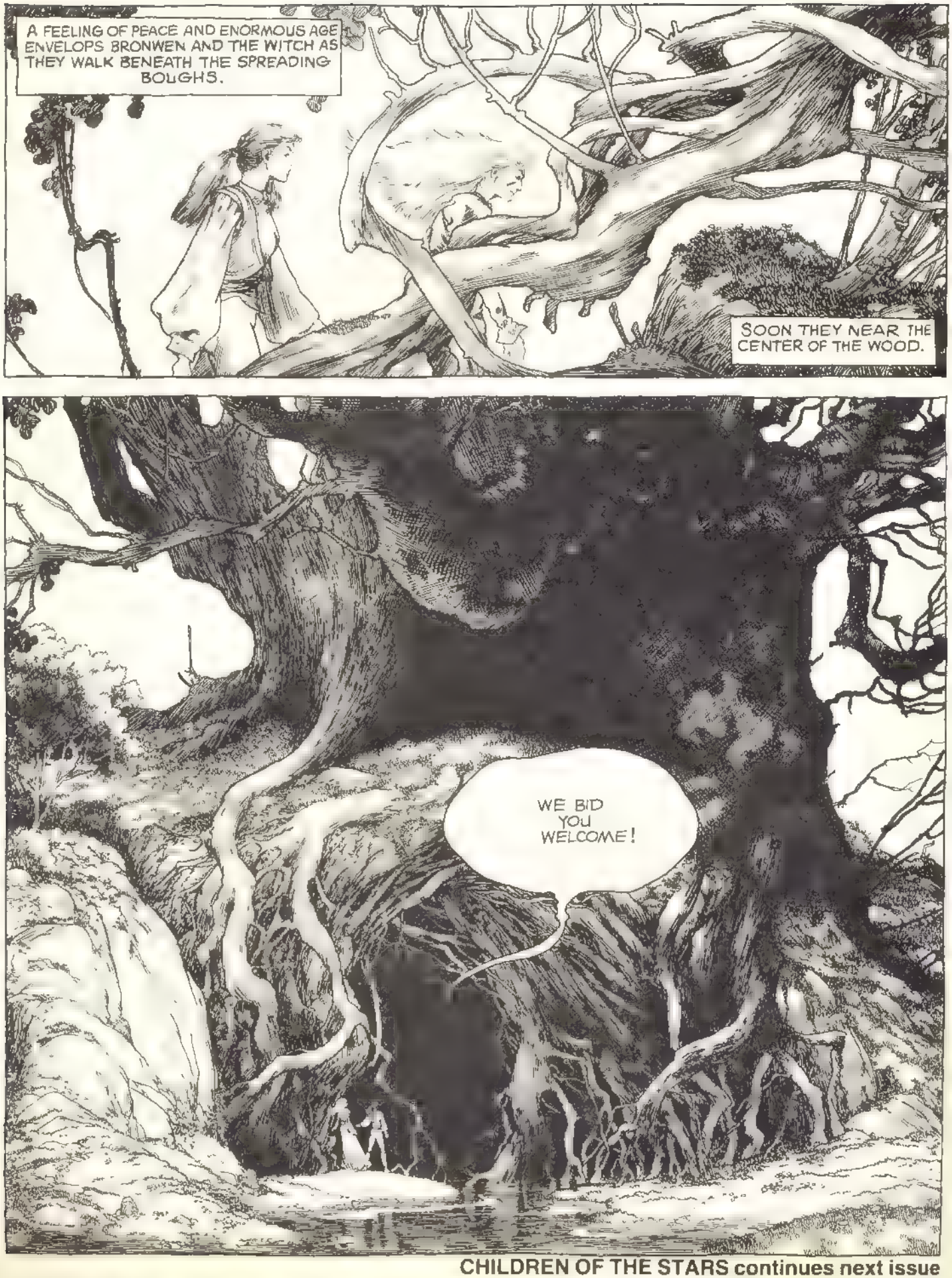


FROM A SPECIAL CABINET, DAME MELINOR DRAWS A LEATHER BOUND VOLUME OF ANCIENT KNOWLEDGE. PLACING IT ON A TABLE, SHE OPENS IT TO A PAGE FILLED WITH CURIOUS SCRIPT AND SYMBOLS. BRONWEN IS FILLED WITH FOREBODING.

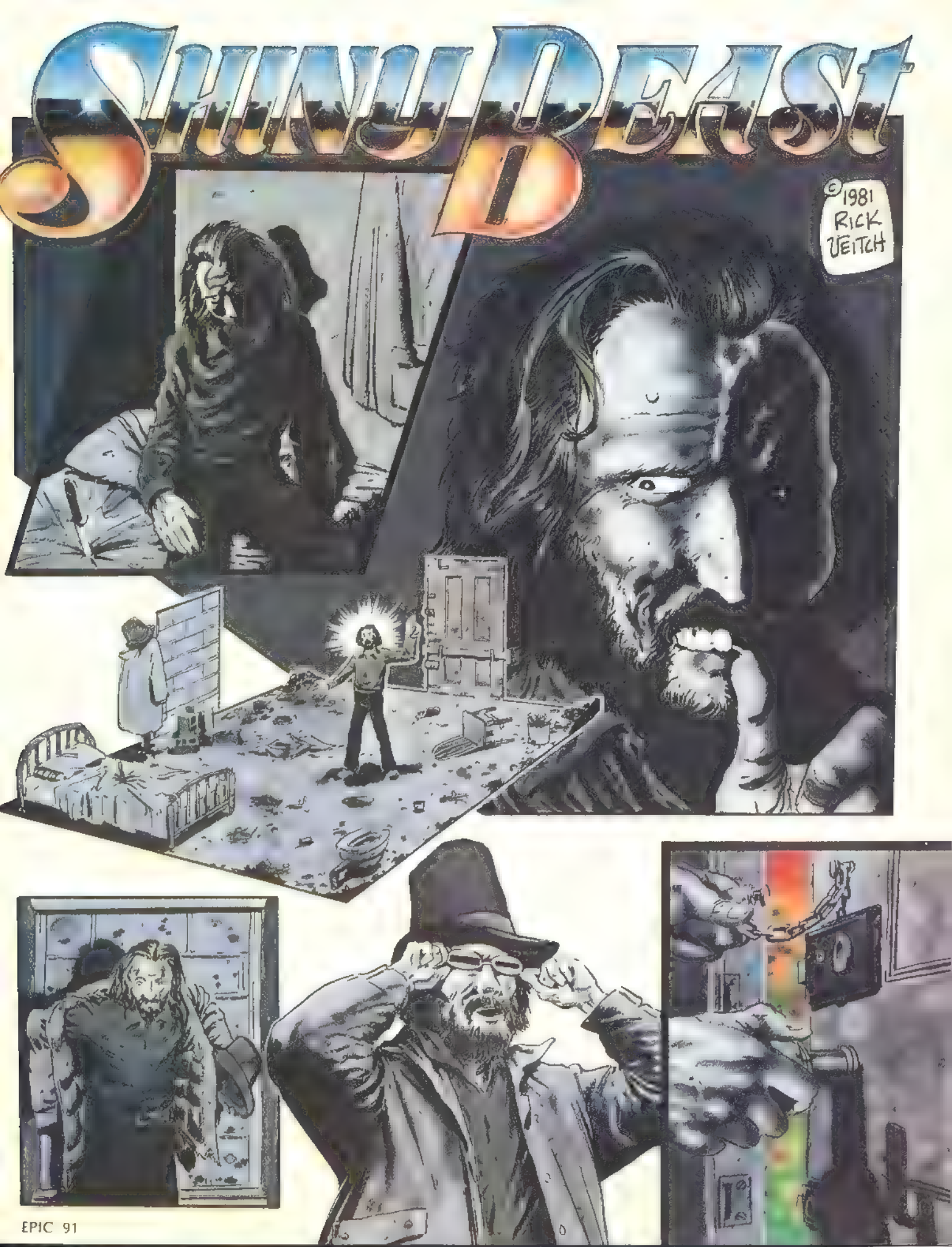




THE ROOM SHIMMERS AND FADES BEFORE BRONWEN'S GAZE! SHE HAS A STRANGE, GIDDY SENSATION OF FALLING THROUGH SPACE, AND ALL AT ONCE SHE AND DAME MELINOR ARE IN ANOTHER PART OF NURNHEIM FOREST.


A FEELING OF PEACE AND ENORMOUS AGE ENVELOPS BRONWEN AND THE WITCH AS THEY WALK BENEATH THE SPREADING BOUGHS.
SOON THEY NEAR THE CENTER OF THE WOOD.
WE BID YOU WELCOME!

CHILDREN OF THE STARS continues next issue


SHINY BEAST
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PAP!
ANTIQUE COMPUTERS
INSIDE POOP!
WHIP IT!
TIME
HOT ROCKET
BETTER BEES
TOXIC
HERO!
PLAYBOY
BELLY BUTTON
GAS!
TRUTH
SHINY BEAST
epic

BUNNY